

The
ralia's magazine of the performing arts

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Theatre Australia

Interview: Robin Ramsay
Jim McNeill's *Jack*
Two *Macbeths*
Louis Esson

National Guide
Comprehensive review section
including film,
ballet, opera, &c.



Mrs Rosanquet meets the Bastard from the Bush

South Australian Theatre Company

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General Manager: Wayne Maddern

Theatre-In-Education
Director: Roger Chapman

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Leslie Dayman, Ronald Falk,
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SEASON TWO 1977

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Irving Berlin musical

CITY SUGAR
by Stephen Pollakoff

MACBETH
by William Shakespeare

A HAPPY AND HOLY OCCASION
by John O'Donoghue

ADVENTURE IN THE DEEP
presented by the Maggie
Theatre-In-Education Company





Theatre

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#COMMENT#

Richard a jaded, crushed-silver, burgandy curtain, Gordon Chaker sits with only a short robe between him and the opening moments of Benjamin Franklin. Hundreds of telephones looking like a bad wall-papering job speak ironically of success while Gordon stridently notes the programme-advised Donahis and beams his news of the London transfer through the fog of the dressing room.

It has been known for some time that the play had been bought — and he, without a trace of pique, wishes it well — but now he has to go too, a successful return after thirty-one years, during which time he has "never thought of myself as anything but Australian".

Other following names are still pulled into the net on who's to play the aging transatlantic in New York — George C. Scott, Richard Briers, Orson Welles — but their uneasy presence disperses quickly and the air clears again. Chis' dough to see Gordon Chase on Broadway? Hal Prince and Stephen Sondheim, no less, will be shocked if he isn't. Mrs Prince is quoted as saying to Hal "this guy has got to do it in New York — he's married to his material".

Gordon (self-effacing as always) remarked this Steve J Speers was "putting himself down by saying the play depended, a propos London and New York, on the shock of a 'local' appearing made on stage", a boy of words for the play, and Chaker would suggest this is true.

Shortly *TA* will be publishing the personal reminiscences of the man on whose shoulder the incredible final piece of Benjamin Franklin has rested — from the moment he first read the script, comically, straight through, to the news of the London engagement.

Not far away Kean Broadbent is announced in a much more opulent room, where only a few days, a second cover and a decorated mirror interrupt the flash wood-paneelling and expensive dask, to testify to the success of *A Citizen Lane* and *The Twentieth and All That Jazz*. The office is in the Comedy Theatre, where *White's Big Top* is again proving the commercial potential of the local product, not far from Her Majesty's in which *A Citizen Lane* will shortly transfer, and where *Phoenix* — was installed under the JCW banner after being opened on the South and cash of its transatlantic notoriety at the tiny Arena Theatre. That too is to follow as the footsteps of Benjamin Franklin to London, and again it is the whole package which is to go.

Across in North Melbourne Nancy Austin, the chairing, seat-accommodating

publicity lady of the MTC, finds only enough Chase to suit Robin Ramsey and the Editors for an interview in the enormous, uncompleted warehouse the company has taken over. Ramsey tells over goddamned young actor who has already toured West End and Broadway seasons, proffers his chair (as did the balloon thier) but to no avail.

We chat, with the elaborate recording gadget and the tatty stacking-stone looking wholly incongruous in the great empty expanse.

Why, no wonder, thinking of a similar building the Old Tate lot at Alexandria, do the same companies go in for these vast unutilised factories?

Ramsey, as the article in this month's issue relates, made it overseas on his own; *The Twentieth* began as a late show with neither subsidy nor big backing, and Benjamin Franklin at the Nomad, which Mike Crosby of Equity has recently derided as only catering "for a minority interest". True the late success to meet Benjamin Franklin in international acclaim, *The Bell*, began at what was to become the largest state company — but that was a long time ago.

Increasingly someone needs for nobody by companies pinking up in many of the scenes on state capital as they last seems to bear no relation to actual received. At the same time the commercial theatre is selling off its inner city theatres. Subsidisation is possibly the only thing which leaves true relation to company run.

Well, the latest addition to the *Time's* "monopoly"-like look though the property itself has not exactly teamed with popular patronage, has been given into the hands of two of the best young Australian directors around, in their different ways Jim Sharman and Rex Cranphorn. If anyone can upset stability and set rooming what was coming to look increasingly stale and elephantine like Seymour Chwast, it is they, and with Hewson, Norman and White already announced, together with Sheppard and Bond, everything suggests well for an exhilarating season.

Back in Melbourne, Hoople still looks for the money to ensure that the Playbox Theatre can be more than just a venue for other productions. Graeme Russell and Carole Gossner get little positive response from the Australian Council — two moderate successes (ironicly good considering they were on the heels of the disastrous MTC flirt with Grand Street) are not sufficient open access to government coffers. Yet the smaller breeding grounds at the moment seem to make for the biggest fish.

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David Gyger talks to Peter Hemmings, new general manager of the Australian Opera.



Peter Hemmings, the new general manager of the Australian Opera, is strikingly unlike his predecessor, John Warbur — a Dane and a pianist, whose wife is an opera singer.

There is none of Warbur's suave Nordic charm about his successor, but right to be a clear Scot, as brusque and twofold is his manner, but is in fact an Englishman by birth, his connections with Scotland came later on, when he became the man at the helm of Scottish Opera in a burgeoning 15 year managerial stint from its inception in 1962 until he resigned to come to Australia. One knows from the official biographical data put out by the AO that he has a wife and five children, but they in no way enter the conversation we are having today in the bowels of the Opera House.

One knows from behind the scenes that he is far from without plans for the future of the Australian Opera even now, and his track record for innovation and box office success in Scotland underlines the expectation that existing times be just over the horizon for his new charge, but Peter Hemmings is playing his cards very close to the chest just now, for we are talking several weeks in advance of his official assumption of power.

Scottish National Opera started in 1962, he recalls, with a one-week season in Glasgow. Its six first five years growth was slow: by 1966 it was only playing a fortnight in Glasgow, with shorter seasons in Perth, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. Till 1975 it was almost permanently on tour. But now it has its own home — the Theatre Royal in Glasgow where this past it is playing for 20 weeks, doing four or five performances of each of 16 operas on subscription. In addition, it is having a one-week season in Edinburgh, two weeks in Aberdeen and six weeks in one of other corners in Scotland and northern England. The company now has 380 permanent employees, and will give 135 performances in 1977.

"The big difference is that in Scotland we allocate operas to orchestras, and so avoid having to square two different orchestras to learn the same opera," says Hemmings, then, without saying a word, obviously refocused his attention on the Australian scene. And a gap suddenly opens in the following words concerning the future, or mightiest opera.

"I feel the whole orchestral business with the Australian Opera needs a great deal of thought," he says. "I'd like to get to the stage where rehearsal is the exception rather than the rule."

"With careful planning of repertory, co-ordinated division of orchestral forces ought to be possible — even desirable," he says. So perhaps the ENO could do all performances of one opera and the ENO all performances of another. Unless there was one opera orchestra big enough and it could be kept.

But what about the old baggage of overseas travel?

"My impression is that people in opera enjoy the stimulus of different audiences," says Hemmings. "But they do not enjoy being away from home a great deal."

And doesn't the prospect of more touring for the AO — a more adequate fulfilment of its national role — inevitably raise the counter-prospect of fewer performances, shorter seasons, at the Sydney Opera House? After all, there are only a fixed number of days in the year and the

AO is not exactly under-committed even now.

"With a bit of increase in personnel," says Hemmings thoughtfully, "I think it's possible for the Australian Opera to serve both functions." He is picking his words carefully, but clearly he is not quite all balance by the problem. "I would say," he continues, "that the Sydney Opera House was built as a means of providing operas and ballet most of not all the year in Sydney. In most if not all words it is synonymous with opera and ballet."

"Already the Australian Opera gives 100 opera performances a year at the Opera House, with careful planning, it will be possible to add more to the output — provided we get the resources required to enable the company to fulfil its national function adequately."

And what about the thorny question of repertory that bedevils every opera company in the world but has been a particular bone of contention for the AO in recent years, with some patrons jumping up and down angrily and/or cancelling their subscriptions because of the inclusion of works like Schubert's *Winterreise* and Liszt's *The Curious Little Prince*, while others complain the AO has too fast sunk too firmly in the mud of the 19th and 19th centuries — Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti and their ilk?

"I agree with John Warbur's policy of repertory development," says Hemmings, but adds, without a pause. "But you must take the public along with you. The standard modern repertory — Stravinsky, Berg, Janáček — is essential." But one must always play the diplomat.

"It is a question of accepting subscriptions and then experimenting without paying them all. My long experience about modern opera is that it is wise to budget for small audiences." And then he adds, almost to himself, "One of the great tragedies is that so many modern composers have such vast audiences that in recent years in Britain some contemporary composers — Britten, Tippett — have been drawing respectably well, and given time I can't see why Australian composers shouldn't gain similar popularity."

Does this mean that new and Australian works would be put on subscription even at the risk of offending some of the more conservative subscribers?

"I would like to see everything on subscription," says Hemmings, "only very occasional non-subscription performances. A city like Sydney should be able to find a regular audience for new works — be able to sell out a few performances."

“? QUOTES & QUERIES ?”



The cover Miss Monaghan meets The Bardard from the Bush, as Patrick White meets Henry Lawson. Kate Filippovich and Helen Ramsey photographed for TA by Bruce Brund.

WHITE A WINNER

WILLIAM WILLIAMS, J.C. *Williamsons Productions*: "As we expected *Big Toys* has caused controversy in Melbourne. Some people love it, others hate it. It is a first class play and has transferred well to the Comedy Theatre. *Big Toys* is J.C. Williamson Productions' first Australian play and we are hoping for the success we achieved with *The Jeweller* and *All This Jazz* — our first Australian musical. Our policy is to entertain and my product that does this and has good commercial potential is of interest to us. I hope recent comments from Australian sources."

COPIOUT

CLIFF ARBENZ: "Cap O'ul, opening at the Royal Street in late November, is my first stage play. I enjoyed writing it immensely. Every journalist wants to be a novelist, every stage playwright wants to write for television, so of course every screen writer wants to write for the stage."

"It is set in a television production house making a police show. So I'm gabbling about it what are — for me — rather familiar paddles. The play moves on as the television manager lectures rather heavily, but there is nothing personal in it. TV has been very kind to me. By and large I've let do pretty much what I like. It's the system I'm attacking, not the individual companies or networks."

"I hope everyone connected with the industry — including the networks — have a good laugh, but I think they might squint without warts a little too."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

ALAN EDWARDS, *Artistic Director, QTC*: "Our latest forays into the country have been those told. We sent a team of four actors/teachers to Charlotte for a week to work with the children of the area. They gave many workshops with them and also classes with both primary and secondary school children in the area. It looks likely that this will become a permanent feature of our operation. *Why Not Say For Breakfast*, which we are presenting in association with the Queensland Arts Council continues its nationally successful tour. Our Project Specialist team is working on Andie Oley's play *Noah* with local youth groups in the Mackay and Hervey Bay areas. This is an exciting and innovative idea which received the financial support of the Schools Commission. Reports have been stimulating and highly commended the standard of work these young Queenslanders are achieving. We are currently planning our 1978 activities, the State Government grant to the QTC of \$227,000, an increase of \$78,000 will enable us to realise many of our existing ideas."



HOOPLA'S FIRST HALF YEAR

GRAEME BURNETT, *Hoopla Productions*: "We have now been definitely backed out by the Australia Council for what is called a 'controversy' grant. In spite of the fact that we have State subsidy and a proper venue, not to mention our personal qualifications, they say that if they gave us money they would have to give it to N and X other companies. So we have now

applied for a 'special projects' grant, and we should know the result of that in December. But even if we don't get it we'll still go ahead somehow. The Late Night season is now underway with *Jazzes*! *Overlook* and the *Downstairs Supper Show* will be running from 2nd to 26th November with Bruce Myers playing *Blues* each in *Hammer* & *Last Wolf Moon*."

"The first of our readings, sponsored by The Age started on 16 October with Ted Nibben's *Let Me In* and continues on 20 November with *The Fragments* *Asleep* of the *Cultural Daughter* by John Lee. In January, instead of the usual two-day old pantomimes children will be able to see *Kiss Shrimpton's Patrick's Mac Tark*, *Richard Bradshaw's Shadow Puppets* and the *Muppet Show* and *Ships in Wonderland* in four performances a day. Then in the Payton in early February *Adam Salter* will be directing *Rock* on with John Waters and myself as half the cast."

"So, we're alive and well and determined to be viable once again what?"

DESIGN EXHIBITION

KIM CARPENTER: "The Dangerous Association is the Performing Arts has just been reformed after having been in abeyance for some time. Initially the Association aims to promote and protect the role of the designer in theatre, TV and cinema and to highlight both professional and public appreciation of their work. The Association is based in Sydney with a committee of ten headed by Anne France as president and Allen Lees as secretary."

"The current membership comprises fifty designers from around Australia. One of our future projects will be a representative exhibition of designs sponsored by the Sydney Opera House Trust in the Exhibition Hall in the Sydney Opera House during April and May 1978."

BUT NO WILLIAMSON FOR WILLIAMSON'S

PAUL RUMFALSKI, J.C. *Williamsons Productions*: "So far our search for new Australian plays and musicals has been very disappointing. We have had quite a few scripts from new and amateur writers who are hopeful, but we have not had anything submitted by established writers, which is what we really want. We are looking for material from the *Williamsons*, the *Burns*, the *Good* people."

"I have spoken to the Writers' Guild and the Producers' and Directors' Guild

and asked them to encourage writers, but nothing has happened: perhaps they still will. I suggested to Bob Ellis that *The Time Is Now For Rage* is just asking to be given musical treatment, and also began to do it then here — we had tremendous financial and artistic success with the commercial production of *The Legend Of King O'Malley* — but he is writing a film at the moment and I don't know whether he has done anything about it."

Letters

Your correspondent, Jacqueline Kott ("Quotas and Quansat" August 1977), deserves gratitude for the grant received by the Peter Schneider Foundation from the New South Wales Premier's Department through the Cultural Grants Advisory Council for the Alan Schneider Workshop. In actual fact, the Advisory Council is an effort to help what they thought would be a worthwhile project, accepted an application from the Foundation months after the closing date — contrary to their otherwise rigid rule that late entries will not be considered.

The Advisory Council was aware that the Australia Council would offer some financial assistance and of course it was expected that the Schneider Foundation would also make a contribution.

Out of a total budget for the Workshop of 26,000, the grant awarded by the New South Wales Government was 12,000 — and her comment that "the State Government have supported an essentially" is therefore not only misleading but most unfair.

John Clark
Chairman
Cultural Grants Advisory Council
NSW

Your August letter mentions forthcoming articles in Australian musical and regional theatre. May I illustrate some down to earth aspects of the subject from my very recent experience with the new musical-writing, *Playlet or Mandy*?

Many people of various allegiances knew about the project, which was specifically for Mandy Centennial Year 1977. Many people offered to help, but very few did.

No local people at all came to the advertised auditions and hardly anyone else, with two talented exceptions, who joined our cast, but our friends in a few local theatre groups were absolutely

marvellous, even postponing some of their own shows to help make ours. That is where the process stops.

Support from other local organisations was entirely minimal. Attendance of local Mandy people was as good as nil. *Adaptations* by school theatre people was almost nil. Spread over five nights less than 400 people came, 300 odd of them were our own friends and contacts, the others from cast and crew contacts. Paid advertising was a complete waste of money.

No critics at all came from the *Mandy Daily*, despite complimentary tickets for several different nights. To my knowledge only one critic came, and at the end, the Editor of the Warrumbidgee paper, *Forward State News*. But he was generous (or perhaps?) enough to describe the musical as "without doubt the most important development in local musical theatre for many years."

The disturbing fact is that the lack of local and Australian interest prompts us to use the recording made from the show just for publicity events, in a brochure to continue the writing and marketing of an English and world-street musical which I allowed to be interrupted for the sake of my apparently uninterested fellow-Australians. I promise to have overseas, both more reliable contacts and a much more sophisticated audience to draw from.

One aim of producing *Playlet or Mandy* was to give it a topical try out with what should have been an assured audience, getting comments from critics, then sending it back into workshop again, for a wider Sydney or Australian audience. However, outside of our enthusiastic group there would appear to be no interest at all. What a waste of material provided for the production of an almost non-existent Australian Heritage Musical Theatre.

Noel Hagen
Mandy, NSW

In his recent review of the Alexander Thomas Company's *The Cherry Orchard*, Jack Hubbard takes a brief but curious detour. Diverging from the main issue at his criticism, he makes a characteristically uncomfortable attack upon the newly established Victorian College of the Arts, School of Drama.

While admitting that it is "naturally much too early to pass judgement on this institution", Hubbard then proceeds to do just that, by totally pillorying the "bizarrest nonsense" he alleges are its current curriculum.

With his first remark Hubbard claims "that the central full-time staff is mainly English or cultured overseas". In fact, there are only three full-time English staff members and five full-time Australians. All the part-time staff are Australian. It would be wrong, however to assume that ignorance is what Hubbard is so about. He is concerned (and rightly so) about the foreign cultural hegemony which impinges on the development of an Australian theatre.

In the regard it is not so much the staff

make up, but the philosophy which dominates the school's direction. This philosophy has a very strong Australian bias. In particular, it states the need for the development of community theatre groups or says that serves the people rather than just the three per cent who currently compose Australian audiences. It should be said that in the school theatre is not regarded as a self-evident "good-thing", but as a means to stimulate thought and affect change.

To suggest that the first-year project, the institution into dramatic form of elements of Xavier Herbert's *Four Faces: My Country* was taken, is to deny an experience which at times raged on the author's. It is fundamental that we as Australian musicians, that there are deep social and political problems in this country, and that we attempt to define them before proceeding to build an Australian theatre.

In *PMAC* Herbert posed problems of identity. This for community theatre workers is of crucial importance at the first major hurdle in this field is "identification" with the people we are working for. In this respect the dramatization of the novel was not indicative of the real learning that went on.

The final remark that Hubbard circulation is that "part of the second year course coincided with productions at Mangan by the Drama of the School (Peter Opatow) "Gives if this were true (which it isn't) we had to see what he's getting at."

After the experience of *Four Faces* the need was felt to work on a play that had deep sub-text — something which we as novice script writers had unfortunately failed to build in our own play. Also we wanted to work on an established text so as to consolidate the acting and technical processes we had been through. We broke up our four groups. Each group chose one act of a *Chimera*, *Widow*, *Pastor* or *Blues* play and spent six weeks (not a fortnight or week) working it. From our point of view the project as a learning experience was very rewarding.

Beyond this, second year is totally devoted to the development of rough theatre skills (juggling, acrobatics, magic, singing, tap, etc.) and on the scripting and rehearsing of group-danced shows for pubs, homes, the street, schools etc., all very necessary for the development of a truly community theatre.

On a personal level, we believe that theatre can be a smoothing weapon for change in a society which is still largely dominated by an "I'm all right Jack" facetious mentality.

Hubbard's machet-making does not in any way help combat this mentality when it serves only to cast suspicion on a school which we believe in years to come will have a proper respect on Australian theatre and society.

Robert Perrier
Phil Sweeney
Second-Year Students
The Victorian College of the Arts,
School of Drama

WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS



Looks as if next year could be Australian Year in London. In new scenes defining Reg Livermore as *The Best*, Sheld Besser Toller as *The Best* at the beginning of the year Gordon Cluer as *The Education of Benjamin Franklin* about March and *The Turnout* and *All That Jazz* presented by Michael Codrington at the Menniel in April. Believe the rumour, to Dan? Williamson's *The Club* has also been sold for London and didn't Paul Eddes suggest he would be touring an Old Time company overseas?

After the success of the 1977 International Music Theatre Forum in Sydney understood there'll be a second forum in 1978 — called Sydney International Theatre Arts Forum, or SITAF for short. Aggressively people like Tieg Goble, Franco Zeffirelli, Penelope Roberts, Bob Fosse, Richard Rodgers, Leonard Bernstein and Gino Quilò Menniel have all been invited. With the Playwrights' Conference being held uniquely in Canberra, our wonders when Melbourne will jump on the bandwagon with some cultural do. Yes, I am aware there's always *Menniel*! Anyhow the Victoria State Opera Company is staging a musical ball on October 23, and that sounds as if it could be fun.

Returning back to the Playwrights' Conference understood Mick Rodgers is to be Artistic Director and our weekly editor Bob Page has now been elected vice chairman of the Conference. At this date no one's been named as chairman. In future too, the Conference will have a two per cent royalty stake in any plays developed there which make off further.

At 73, Anne Neagle opens in the West End in a musical version of James Barrie's *When Pearly Grown*, known, entitled *Magpie*. Eric Durr tells me he's going

to bring Steven Berkoff in his own play *East in Australia* next year. Max Collins challenging up his 100th performance in *A Speech of the Assassination of Robert* in November. Believe there's a strong probability magician Ian Bushland (who's saying 72 speeches of "Ian Bushland's Magic Bag" to be seen on the ABC next year) will be playing *Aladdin* to Les Girls' Star Stan Morris's, *Madam Tansley*.

A very sales luncheon party given in Melbourne to celebrate the first anniversary of Menniel's production of *The Education of Benjamin Franklin*. The 15 or so people around the table included Gordon Cluer, Steve J. Speers, Wilton Manley, Paul Lee, Barry Funder, all the stage staff concerned with the production and a handful of media hounds. Dan's think it was generally known, but Paul Lee (who's Menniel's live wire general manager) confided to me a clue was the first anniversary of his arrival in Australia. Paul makes a trip back to England for a month soon. Michael Berkoff, who conceived, photographed and directed *A Chinese Day*, apparently is getting about U.S. \$90,000 per week gross income from the musical. Figure includes seven per cent from the Sydney production.

Near Helen Mirra could be playing the role Susan Hampshire had in the London production of *Sorcerer*, Maughan's *The Circle* where it turns here next year with George Wilkins and John McAlunan. The London production was originally a transfer from the Chichester Festival Theatre, so wonder why the Australian Playhouse Theatre Trust are seeking money only its Australian presentation and not the Chichester Festival Theatre proper's lot, which is being sponsored by

Robert Stengers, J.C. Williamson Productions and Michael Edgley International.

Believe though the Trust will have a quarter share in Menniel's production of *The Club* when it transfers to the Theatre Royal about next February. Michael Edgley's next blockbuster musical will be early in the New Year when he'll bring the *Melbourne Circus* on for one.

Dan Hattys and Peter Finner, the Melbourne team responsible for several musicals (particularly children's) over the years, are now transferring their residence to Sydney. Peter tells me their latest musical, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, will be staged at the Alexander Theatre next January (there's also the possibility of another being produced in Sydney and quite likely another one of their children's musicals will be performed throughout the country around the same time. My reaction in the August issue of a rumour that one of our national directors intends touring next year I am now assured is strictly not so. A long wait overseas probably but certainly nothing more. Is it the Australian Ballet or the Australian Opera Company I wonder, which is considering doing its own version of *A Prince in a Ragged Coat*?

Problems that some of the national companies outside of Melbourne are up against was highlighted to me when someone from Brisbane mentioned as reason for not frequently staging the Queensland Theatre Company production the over-exposure of talent, i.e. seeing the same people again and again often giving similar performances.

Although it's been touring for about a year, *The Soap Box Circus* goes into the Power Factory for the first time in November, for the APG's Christmas Show.

The first \$7,000 Armstrong-Martin Scholarship given to assist in providing advanced overseas musical education for its recipient, will be awarded to one of its students on 22 January 1978 in the concert hall of the Sydney Opera House.

Next of Australians in England Billie Brown, late of the G.T.C., at Stratford in the *Heavenly*. Darlene Johnson has joined the company at Stratford. Fast for the season. Michael Steinfirth (English, but he was in the Menniel theatre restaurant potter musicals) is playing the boy who leaves home in *A Chinese Law*.

Point O Sharpness in the Oxford Playhouse Company's *You Never Can Tell*. Bob Hornby has just directed an Australian play at ICA and is contemplating a telephone to show off his second child. (Liza Towner and Dennis Clucas are with the RSC at the Abbey).

Just says it is the Chichester music. Wonder if the B is with the company when it tours here next year.



Tracks & Ways

Robin Ramsay in interview with *Theatre Australia* traces the paths which have led him to Broadway fame, TV mass recognition and back to the Australian boards and his farm at Bega.

"I've followed all my tracks and ways from old back school to Leicester Square. I've been right back to hybrid days, and found no light or pleasure there."

So said Henry Lawson, that Australian of all Australian figures, whose Robin Ramsay, one of our best internationally known actors, is portraying each night for the Melbourne Theatre Company. Ramsay has taken a selection of Lawson's songs, poems, letters and narratives and, under the direction of Rodney Fisher, has woven them into an evening that evokes turn-of-the-century Australia, England, alcoholism, imprisonment and poverty. They are the lesser known works, a combination of which does not give the more usual, sentimental view of Lawson, and through which Ramsay portrays some

of Lawson's characters as well as the man himself.

Nathaniel Hawthorne and is related to Lawson that there is a fatal "which almost, awfully complete human being is larger around and more, glowing, the spot where some great and marked event has given colour to their lifetime."

Robin Ramsay has known success in America, London and Japan, and yet he has returned to live and work in Australia. Like Lawson, part of the reason for this is a deep love for and affinity with the Australian bush and living close to the land, he has built himself a house at Bega, where he retired when not working, and lives on his chickens and vegetables, working on an oyster farm. Recently he worked as a theatre consultant to the South Australian Arts Council in order to

be able to spend time in the bush, in a way of life that is almost totally opposite to that of the actor living the streets each night.

The life of an actor was suggested to Ramsay by Dr Doolittle, the headmaster of Croydon Grammar, where his theatrical performances received more acclaim than his academic ones. His parents left for England when he was sixteen, Robin "lugged along, told a bit of a fib about my age, auditioned for RADA and got in."

It was a pretty overwhelming experience with people like Peter C. Toole and Albert Finney in the years ahead of him, but an excellent place to gain experience, which he also did by working at the Chelsea Palace with the infamous comedian Max Miller at weekends.

His reason for returning to Australia



after that was simply to avoid being caught up in the Cyprus troubles, but after doing his national service, he joined that premier professional theatre company, the Union Repertory Company under John Sumner.

"At that stage it was the only place in Australia where actors could earn any money — apart from what was known in the Melbourne circuit, eleven rather wily actors who used to do all the radio shows. We were a very young company. Patricia Connolly and I were ASMs, she was twenty-five and I was eighteen, there was Zoe Caldwell and George Ogilvie, and Win Roberts was the old man of the company at thirty-three."

In 1962 Robin Ramsay left for America — "I had an American wife at the time, which meant I could work there" — partly because at that point he felt unable to relate to an Australian way of life. "It was a very relaxing period in those days, and there were all these huge actors, women and drunkards, and I drank beer and couldn't cope. I really let out of it."

He had also left the Union Rep to work on the first Adelaide Festival, and found on his return that another actor had stepped into the vacated boots, and he was left doing the walk-ons. "I had a lot of confidence at the time. I couldn't do what I

wanted to do here, the AETT had started but I couldn't even get an interview as there were too many people there like Neil Fitzpatrick, so I decided to go to America."

America did turn out to be something of a land of opportunity, for after landing up in Times Square with a suitcase and no money, and experiencing the delights of the YMCA, Ramsay got a job in a restaurant at night so he could audition during the day — "the great thing about New York was that you could see two hundred people a day about jobs" — and joined the National Repertory Theatre very quickly.

They toured throughout America with productions like *Twelve Angry Men*, *Shower* and *Elizabeth the Queen*, and then Robin moved on to the Theatre Company of Boston. "That's where I first did any London, with a whole collage of Australian things, to make money. Universities there will pay for anything a bit different, they'd have Bertrand Russell one night, Pablo Casals the next and me the next."

When work finished in Boston, Ramsay went back to New York and met up with Harry Humpries whom he'd known in Australia. Humpries was just leaving the part of the undertaker he'd been playing in *Oliver*, with that went the understudy to the part of Fagin, and Robin stepped into both.

At that point David Mervin wanted the rights to *Oliver Twist* and Peter Brook wanted Clive Revell, who was playing Fagin, so they did a swap and at the age of twenty-four Robin Ramsay starred playing Fagin on Broadway. As luck would have it, the casting director was also replaced just then, and the new one didn't realise that his Fagin was not the right age so he was kept on for two years.

It was an extraordinary two years for a young Melbourne actor, and included doing things like waging a couple of marionettes from *Oliver* on the *Ed Sullivan Show* when the Beatles were on it, to an audience of 40,000,000 viewers — "The Beatles wanted my autograph" — but towards the end of it he felt the need for further development and returned once again to Australia in the hope of new opportunities.

He went back to home-ground first and did a lot of work with George Ogilvie on what had become in his opinion the Melbourne Theatre Company. Other professional companies had also come into being, and the production of *How Could You Believe Me?* — John Bell's adaptation of the Golden Service of Two Marrows was quite a new direction for the Old Tote. "Drew Parnham, John Gaden and Robin Neve were in the cast, something wonderful was happening then



It's a shame the Tate didn't let it go further — in fact I was disappointed last year when I did *The Ring*, and as the girls opening they didn't even let the play with everything else the Tate had done. As if they were inhibited of it."

With that particular new direction Gilling to take next — at least at the Tate — Ramsey launched himself into television acting as Charlie Cousins in *Balldrop*, and became a household name. He feels that an actor should always be expanding in his own range of creativity and that learning to work in a new medium is one way of doing that.

Playing Pontius Pilate in the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* gave him another chance to do this by working with people who were not primarily actors. The experience of vital young talents — which is this one included Jon Sturman — has also proved immensely stimulating. "Jon was very different with JCS than when I played Macbeth in his *Threepenny Opera*, which was a stunning thing to do. First one was a company that you wished could have gone on and done other things."

A company that did go on and do other things was Nimrod, and Ramsey was impressed by the way everyone in the production was involved in every part of Mantel's Tower, even re-designing the set with Larry Eastwood and Richard

Wherret. He would very much like to work with Max Gillies and other APG actors whom he much admires, but carefully explains "I wouldn't want to cloud business for six months in case if they did not as an actor. When one's done one's apprenticeship there are other things."

Ramsey has "this holy thing about acting", (although he thinks "the rough and the holy often go together") says *Jesus Christ Superstar* and feels that for him personally doing commercials is somehow sacrilegious to talent. But he admits it is only good fortune that has allowed him not to be prosecuted in that way.

When work is scarce he retreats to dogs because "there doesn't seem any point in doing something as an actor that you're not yet ready for or that you've gone beyond. That doesn't necessarily mean that you must only do the great writers, not at all. I'm doing *Rock on the River* because it has a special quality."

The special quality of Australia theatre is something Ramsey strongly believes in, a quality that he lends is mentioned by David Williamson's recent direction of *40 My Son* at the SATC. "It had a much more lively, taught awareness" than English Rep style which is being perpetuated by "directors of second rate English provincial theatres being appointed to run our companies." It is not

the directors personally that Ramsey has any grudge against, but the situation that is allowed to exist whereby English directors are being currently appointed to stage theatre companies.

In Perth the director of the Haregate Rep has taken over, now we have a class sweep of English directors all over Australia. I don't think we should fire Semler and Allen Edwards, but it's a shame that in Adelaide we should just have brought in an English director who stars his English wife, has an English designer and an Englishman running the youth theatre." The idea of exchanging artists between countries is more than acceptable, but straight imports to Australia is just as dangerous.

The music and varied work he has done in other countries would seem to have taken its due place in assessing the versatility and polishing the talent of Robin Ramsey, in a balanced way that has allowed him to make use of it without being seduced by it. His tracks have led him back to Australia, the bush and the theatrical medium, between which latter two he leads a life balanced as extremes, the one representing a capacity for the other.

"But every dream and every track — and there were many that I knew —

"They all lead on, as they lead back, to Bourke in Ninety one and two."

Louis Esson



By the time that Louis Esson's play, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* had been performed for the first time on 23 July 1912, the thirty-three year old author had made a name for himself as an Australian playwright. Later he was to be the main person concerned in the formation of the Pioneer Players, the first group of Australians to write and act only plays written by Australians about Australians. They performed twenty plays between May 1928 and June 1938, five of which were three act plays. Yet none of the four plays which Esson wrote for the Pioneers was to receive the accolade which was given

to *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* when it was produced by Gregson McMahon of the Melbourne Repertory Company at the Athenaeum theatre in 1912. It played in a packed house which included the Prime Minister of the time, Andrew Fisher.

Strangely enough, the play was not performed again until 1972 when it was staged at the Melbourne Union Theatre by students of Trinity College and Joan Clarke Hall. Louis Esson's granddaughter, Kathy Esson, played the leading role of Doris.

A newspaper review published in the *Australian* of 24 June 1972 by Katherine

Bridson commented on "the outstanding quality of the play and the absolutely top-to-tote propensities not of the writing". She quoted as one example the representation of a Chicago syndicate, Mr Hill, who wants to buy up the Northern Territory and "driving the country, bring it up to date, Australianise it" but who needs "artificial concessions" (Act I, p8). Another was the dairy socialist, Hapkins who (tells his unemployed friend)

They won't become capitalists until their backs are driven against the wall. A long drought and industrial depression, that's what Australia needs (Act II, Sc 1, p18).

There are other aspects of the play which suggest that people in Australia are still concerned with many of the same ideas as in Esson's day. Lady Polkshury declares when Doris is asked to stand for parliament

We (women) have been kept down for centuries by men made law. All we need is more opportunity to display our ability. That is why I never allow my husband to make up his mind on any public question before he has consulted me (Act I, p64).

There also reminds us that Esson was writing at a time when Australia led the world in giving women the vote and introducing compulsory school education. The Prime Minister's very English brother declares, "Australia is the only country where the peasantry make the laws" (Act IV, p34), and the sombre socialist, Hapkins, complains, "This is the country of the gruffed working man" (Act II, p19).

Although Esson balances the scales equally between the left and the right at points by satirising both in the play and his conclusion seems to be that "The time is not yet ripe" for socialism, it was at this time that he was contributing articles to the *Melbourne Star* and Among these were various lampooning capitalism periodicals as "The Sick King" (the title which was published on 4 March 1910 and an article, "Eight Hour Day", printed on 28 April 1911. Esson's wife wrote of this period

"We were all rebels and it was at this time that Louis was busy writing on the old *Archer* edited by W.S. Ross, articles that Bernard O'Dowd told him with a twinkle in his eye, could bring him five pence for column. Although he was not a disciplined revolutionary, Louis never accepted the present social order, nor the conventional standards, it placed any more than on literary questions."

As a personal of Esson's article "Our last socialist", republished in the *Currency Press* 1973 edition of his play, clearly shows, most of Esson's views are also those of the playwright.

On the night of the 1912 performance, however, that audience was not content that the playwright held any strong socialist opinions. The *Star* of 24 July 1912 reported

Impudently he distributes water and only a profaned politeness could excuse him of "bureaucracy". Every class is a badly frustrated way, he teases with and but smacks the hollow extravaganzas, the lies and shrewdness

is Not Yet Ripe, Jess Wilkins discusses the plays of Louis Esson

of those engaged in the government of the country and those who are engaged in governing them" (*Parliamentary Drama*), p. 64. It could be argued, indeed, that Barrett is not really so worried but that he was more concerned with improving the quality of life of his countrymen. In his pre-war drama, he is to his audience.

I believe in compulsory Greek in schools and universities open air cafes where one could drink wine and meet one's friends (poets and artists) a few hours waiting they no daily newspapers, picture shows, programming. (Civ. Ill. p. 61)

Possibly Esson became more serious about his politics and had renewed thoughts about the ideological system of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*. Philip Parsons in the introduction to the Camargo Press edition of the play relates that three years an unprinted copy of the 1912 edition in which Esson "seems to intend" to replace the dialogue between Doris and Barrett that leads to the breaking of their engagement with "ideological argument" (*Parliamentary Drama*).

Heavily stylized dialogue of the same kind appears again at the end of the play, partly clearly with the intention of giving more ideological substance to the final reconciliation between the lovers. Other major changes include a shift of time away from the beginning to the end of the play. (p. 116)

These revisions probably belong to the period when Esson had become a serious disciple of naturalism and hence wanted to make his play more realistic. It would, however, have been unfortunate if he had made his play more serious in tone.

Kathleen Barstow calls *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* "a highly Shavian comedy", yet Esson's only reference to G. B. Shaw is not complimentary: "As I recall, he is a brilliant failure and he has no feeling for life", wrote Esson in the *Illustration* on 11 July, 1913. Esson, the character of Doris, Esson's narrative heroine, is not unlike the "new woman" of the plays of Shaw and those — Major Barbara, Candida and Man. Again, Barrett's efforts to shock his audience into an awareness of the social system in which they live, have similarities of Shaw's tactics.

If Esson did not acknowledge any admiration for Shaw, he was prepared to sit at the feet of another master. This was the Irish playwright W. B. Yeats whom he first met with J. M. Synge while on a journey to Europe in 1904 and again in London in 1920.

In 1904 and 1905, Esson and his friend and fellow dramatist, Leon Brodsky, saw Yeats' plays, *The King's Threshold* and *The Shadow of the Glen*, and Synge's plays, *In The Shadow of the Glen*, *The Well of the Saints* and *Widowers in the Sea* at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.¹

Esson came back to Australia to write three short plays which were published in 1911. These were *The Woman Turner*, a comedy based on his knowledge of slum characters in "Little Lon" (Lonsdale Street), Melbourne; *Dead Tuesday*, a tragedy of a bush farmer and a slave; *Flare* dealing with Melbourne Indian hawkers whose religion interested Esson

Owen Maitland produced *Dead Tuesday* on 11 and 14 December 1911 while William Moore staged *The Woman Turner* at his first Drama Night on 5 October 1910 and *The Slave* Place on his fourth Drama Night on 15 May 1912, two months before the performance of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*.

William and T. Inglis Moore dedicated their anthology *Best Australian Plays*, published in 1937, to Louis Esson

whose group of one-act plays, produced in Melbourne about 1911, was the first original and dramatic contribution to our drama.

This was at a time when the critics as middle classes who formed the main audience for drama, looked mostly to productions which had already succeeded overseas, for their entertainment. Australian drama hardly existed.

It was during this period that Esson published two slim volumes of verse, *Belts and Shoes* in 1910 and *Red Grass and Other Poems* in 1911, as well as various sketches and short stories in the *Evening Herald*.

A second meeting with Yeats in London in 1920 led to Esson becoming involved in the formation of the Premier Players, modelled on the players of the Abbey Theatre. Synge's advice to Esson to "go to the life of the people" he interpreted, unfortunately, as meaning country people. Although Esson was more familiar with city people, as he had shown in *The Woman Turner* and *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, he agreed with Synge that "there is more possibility of a distinctive Australian literature arising in the mysterious country back of Sydney" than in the cities which are like cities in other countries. This attitude was reinforced by Esson's admiration for Australian writers realistically about the bush, especially Henry Lawson.

Another unfortunate influence was Yeats' suggestion that Esson "ought to" have "broad changes in tragedy",² an opinion, probably formed after he had read Esson's moving short play *The Drifters* written in London on his second visit.

For the Premier Players, Esson wrote *Marker and Son* and *The Bride of Gospel Place*, serious plays which, however, led to his only real drama, and a comedy of life as a divorced goldfish. *The Reader* which is slight and unimpressive. Audiences for the Premier plays were small and critics were unenthusiastic.

Esson's gift for humour and dialogue is rarely present in his Premier plays. He seems to regard it as no longer suitable for drama. In the introduction to *The Southern Cross and Other Plays* Hilda Esson writes of the meetings of Henry men in Melbourne:

I wish some of the stories of Shakespeare could be told, when Lovers' devastating and repulsive was the delight of his friends and the discomfort of his foes. His interpretation of "doubtful superior" may well have been to "define the purpose" and it was a sport he never ceased to enjoy. (Appendix)

In *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* Esson's audience actually enjoys his sport in "defining the purpose" — both Doris

father and her sister. Although the same theme, the need for freedom and emotional pleasure in life, runs through some of his serious Premier plays, notably *Marker and Son* and even *The Bride of Gospel Place*, Esson was never to write again with the same lightness of touch that he displays on his political comedy. He seemed to forget that "there is his individual aspect first a long and memorable tradition in Drama" and that comedy may be a vehicle for serious ideas.

After the Premier Players ceased their activities in 1926, Esson continued to write plays but these were never acted. 18 health restricted his activities until his death in 1944. Nevertheless, his strong championship of Australian drama made him a legend in his own lifetime.

It is to Esson and the Premier Players that we owe the tradition that Australians could write plays about their own people and that companies would be formed to produce such plays.

In them, moreover, we can probably attribute the strong belief in naturalism (which they equated with realism) which for so long provided Australian plays, as well as their traditional structure. It was not until the production of Patrick White's *Mosses From a Tree* (1962) and Michael Radford and Bob Ellis' *The Legend of King O'Malley* (1967) that these traditions began to be broken.

The involvement in the bush which which so many Premier plays displayed has continued as a strong conviction of our drama. Such plays as Ray Lawler's *The Summer of the Sirens* (1957) and Jack Hibberd's *A Sketch of the Imagination* (1972) show this.

Esson's use of the Australian vernacular in his "slang" plays, moreover, set a style which can still be heard in so many plays today, from *The One Day of the Year* (1937) to *The Women of the Year* (1977).

While it is to be regretted that Esson abandoned the writing of serious, witty comedy about the kind of life with which he was directly involved, after the performance of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, yet, perhaps, his concern for the quality of Australian life continues in many contemporary playwrights. The one that comes to mind is the author of that other "slanguage" play, *Don't Party* (1971) in which Williamson's more savage satire conveys a somewhat similar regret to that of Esson's character, Barrett, that people do not desire "freedom, joy and splendour".³

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4. Letter from London from L. Esson to V. Palmer, dated 23 November 1908, V. Palmer, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, p. 25.
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6. Act IV, p. 64.

Part Two

The Armidale Experience



Ray Omodei
& Diana Sharpe

The Armidale Project 1971, outlined in *Thru the Armidale* October 1976, is over. After eight weeks rehearsal and four and a half months in the Northwest, the company pulled out on 14 July, returning to Sydney to show the *Albino* which had been developed up there, to city audiences at the NIDA Theatre. It played to seven packed houses and could have continued for three or four weeks more, had the theatre and actors been available. Reaction to the project has been more than encouraging and on 12 September Raymond Omodei and John Newby returned to the district for six weeks of intensive follow-up programmes for teachers in Boggabilla, Guyra, Katoomba, Narrang and Murrumbidgee. Plans are already under way for an expanded programming in 1978.

Last November there were over 100 applicants for auditions. For our purposes, acting talent was not the only consideration. Interviewees were education and involved practitioners of personality functioning in a learning/teaching together situation for six months. We were also looking for actors who were articulate in the three-dimensional area of our work and who would be able to communicate with tertiary as well as secondary and primary students and staff. The company finally selected Ray Anderson, Jim Collins, Barbara Dennis, Malcolm Keith, Dallas Lewis and Chris Orsham. John Wigg directed production for students and primary schools — Raymond Omodei, the Project

Director, was responsible for the rest. John Newby was appointed Company Manager. His outstanding capacity for the technical, public relations and company spirit aspects of the project was largely responsible for its smooth flowing, effectiveness and impact.

Malcolm Keith and Barbara Dennis, the senior members of the acting company, gave generously of their talents and expertise in company classes (voice, movement, fencing, mime and general coaching). Their professional and personal contributions were extensive and vital. Accomplished performers themselves, they took great delight in the less experienced members of the company and were both examples and teachers to them.

The programme was to begin with a play for the general adult public, progress to schools presentations and develop a play in situ for the adult audience of college and university. The selection of *Midwinter's of Frost to Melba* was fortunate — and during eight weeks of reading and agonising over a selection of suggested scripts.

Midwinter at first would not release the play to us, claiming that it was impossible to perform with only six actors. We managed to persuade it in that we could do it with lightning quick changes and a minor transposition of one of the scenes. He then happily gave permission. Some in doubt took exception to some of the language in the text — but generally, audiences relished it.

The tour had a triumphant opening in Taree, in an abominable school hall, to a capacity audience and progressed for a month through the North coastal and Northwest towns, finishing off with three performances in Armidale. A restaurant in Taree dropped the customers seated overnight in the dressing rooms, with the result that the actors of Katoomba (the next town) were given the additional delight of seeing the entire wardrobe dropped in the car for hours, on ladders, buses and non-recommending ladders.

Yoda's Tour's splendid set and the costumes from the Old Tax production drew gasps of delight, especially in the towns where "big" shows don't usually play and where people rarely are professionally designed products of such excellence. Local opinion was that the word of mouth on *Melba* was an understatement if we had back-packed on the tour, we would have had packed houses.

Much loved by the country audiences, *Melba* had a mixed reception as its first night in Armidale. The performance was

below par, the result of exhaustion from a strenuous tour and the fact that the leading players had been rehearsing both *The Adversary* and preparing *The Albino* so to within a couple of hours of opening. Unknown to us, the theatre is equipped with an air conditioning system which is both erratic and has a fearful effect on the comfort for the spoken voice.

The company rehearsed *Albino* in the theatre after the opening night, adjusted to the peculiar acoustics and refined the performance which had been somewhat questioned after playing in a series of venues ranging from student halls to the young citizens of civic centres. Subsequent performances were received with tremendous enthusiasm by large audiences.

For schools, *Goodies* by Richard Tallich and *I Suppose I'd Better* — by Michael Cove, were effective products of commission. The readings and rehearsals supported their choice and with minor changes on rehearsal they proved extremely successful with students and teachers.

We were worried about *The Adversary* by John Mulhegan, from the outset — however, the idea and some of the writing had potential. The aim was to workshop and develop the text. The final product, however, proved unsuitable for the intermediate students. A preview in Sydney attended by officers of both companies brought praise for the acting and directing but alarm was expressed at the play itself.

The company rehearsed for eight weeks, from 29 December, initially at Randwick and then at the Old Tate's rehearsal studios before departing for Armidale on 18 February. We decided to look at *The Adversary* again after the *Melba* tour was launched, to see what could be done with the text. We spent several days "workshopping" it at the end of the first week of the tour and kept striving at it: 24/24.

It was finally decided to keep it rehearsed in its initial state and to develop a minor show devised by Malcolm Keith with the same cast. Both shows were presented in Armidale to an invited audience of teachers and inspectors who were unanimous in their praise for the work in both offerings and strongly in favour of the more show as the proper choice for presentation to intermediate students. *The Adversary* was considered excellent fare in, say, under-graduate terms, but in tone and content it was not accessible to children in the intermediate age group.

Teachers and inspectors were unimpressed by the fact that we were concerned enough

to produce a product we regarded as essential despite weeks of work and expense. They were also favourably impressed by the company's ability to provide an effective alternative. Both companies must had together on one vehicle and were programmed, in most cases, into the same school. The concept of creating two simultaneous performances at schools is clearly a good one and much appreciated by teachers as it causes minimum disruption to the working day. However, it is only in primary schools that this can be done (they often have several double classrooms) as we usually used the hall/gymnasium in high schools and had to play one after the other.

We have been most fortunate this year that the Intermediate play, being a more show, was readily adaptable for the wide age range it was to cover. In that it is unlikely we shall be able to find as flexible a play again in 1978, both companies should have two plays in their repertoires in line plays for schools altogether: Junior Primary, Senior Primary, Junior Secondary, Senior Secondary.

The May season of *Orkels* recognised the public and in particular the staff of the English department — many of whom came more than once. Their letters of praise for the company's work delighted us.

Ray Ormrod worked on the text and found that it could be performed, almost entire, with seven actors, two doubling (*Bashagor/Cassio*), (*Lamila/Bianco*) and one multi-role playing *Hedwig/Duke/Clown/Ladario*. Design of set and costumes was simple and stark. The audience response was overwhelming. We played two extra performances and turned away nearly 100 people at one of these. One extra performance sold out an twenty-two hours because of an excellent P.W. response.

Our relationship with the University of New England was cordial, productive and rewarding and the co-operation from the Arts Theatre staff — Bob Herbert and Vic Ashford — beyond praise. We were extremely assisted also by various service

departments and of course, by the enthusiasm of Department Heads and the Pro Vice-Chancellor. Apart from the performances of *Orkels* and *Melba* the company provided the University with many other activities such as seminars, radio broadcasts, even sessions from Malcolm Keith (an accomplished boxer) with the Fencing Club.

For the College of Advanced Education we offered performances of the three schools plays: *disaster* (R.O.) (assistance with four plays being produced there) and an extensive series of workshops conducted by Ray Ormrod, with voice and movement classes conducted by Barbara Denton. We would have liked to have involved the company more with the CAE but it was impossible successfully to marry the College's timetable with our touring schedule.

The Company
 Ray Ormrod — Project Director
 John Newby — Company Manager

Intermediate Schools Company

Ray Anderson
 Malcolm Keith
 Barbara Denton

Junior/Senior Schools Company

Joni Caffin
 Gillian Lewis
 Chris Orchard
 All cast in *Orkels* and *Melba*

Time-table

29 Dec. 76 to 15 Feb. 77: *Robur* and
 22 Feb. to 21 March: *Melba* tour
 23 March to 16 July: *School* tours
 including
 23 March to 4 June: *Robur* & *Orkels*

Number of Performances

<i>A Tour to Melba</i>	22
<i>Robur</i> (Junior play)	83
<i>Melba</i> (Intermediate play)	82
<i>A Support</i> (Senior play)	34
Subtotal	221

Workshops

31 schools
 1 for local amateur theatre group
 Vehicle Miles Traveled: 25,000

It was impossible to accommodate all the requests from amateur groups for workshops and assistance. The company was too close to allow this. Ray Ormrod, John Newby and a touring actress from Sydney (Selma Martin, now a student in the University of NSW's School of Drama) gave a day assisting the Glass House group with its production of *The Old Couple* and the company held informal seminars on several towns after *Melba* performances.

We are proud of the company's work done for the *Amadeus* Project under the banners of the Old Tote and ATYP and grateful for the constant support of all those concerned to see a successful *Amadeus*, and in the light of our experience, we will make even more productive use of the enormous energy and effort expended in the sheer operation of the touring.

The Project has been immensely successful. As a professional theatre company based in the area it has, in five months, made itself felt and known and needed. The collective and individual contributions made by the company were enormous. People were quick to voice their praise for the range and quality of the work and the pleasant willingness of the company to accommodate the expressed needs in the area where humanly possible. Expressions of hope that the company would return and stay in the area were universal.

We hope to see the programme repeated, expanded and reinforced. The work was relentless but productive and profoundly rewarding on every possible level. This concept is an effective alternative to and an improvement on the old "touring from Sydney" mode. Those outside the metropolis are entitled to their share of the entertainment, from tax dollar and the type of theatre, theatre-in-education programme and service the Project provided for the people in the area was a positive, visible and identifiably relevant one.



The Role of

Frances Kelly is critic for *The Australian* and *Londoner* theatre journalist

Unloved, unwanted, misunderstood, underpaid — oh yes, it's a sad profession; see us weep into our free gin and tonics any night in any foyer. You wonder why we bother.

Since the *Dead-End Dicks* affair, the recent Playwrights' Conference, during which Australian theatre critics came in for some solid hammering, and following Helen Davies's remark published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that critics these days perform largely a social function ("I really just letting people know what's on"), not forgetting *Theatre Australia's* own effort in underestimating a critic, I have been wondering just why we do bother.

Assuming that a critic sometimes might, after night to the stage of the stage, the actors, the setting, the craft of it all, out of love and fascination, why after one's opinion for publication? Is it a case of ego in criticism?

Probably the answer is that a critic is as much a show person as an actor, with the same need to exhibit and entertain as a playwright — and be praised for doing it. The critic's stage is the journal, the audience the readers, with much the same responsibilities of an actor or writer — to express and enlighten with enjoyment.

While Charles Matzner was in gaol down as one of the major critics of his age, he had some interesting points to make about criticism.

He said in his book, *Confessions of a Critic's Wife* (Cine), he believed with Oscar Wilde that "the creation of a fine piece of criticism stands shoulder to shoulder with the creation of a fine piece of art, and today, when the theatre is so assailed by fraud, parodying its novelty or routine disguised as 'technical points', the critic's responsibility is even greater than the artist's."

I wouldn't go as far as saying the responsibility is "even greater" than the artist's, but it certainly is important in the light of fraud and novelty.

Matzner further says "remove the critic and you remove the artist's recognition of what he has accomplished. You remove the director of reference by which the artist can measure his result. The critic should not be thought of as a coloured object of the theatre, but as its actual and front mirror."

That, you may say, is all very well if you

respect the artist involved, and plainly only very few Australian critics are respected by the profession currently.

We are not writing for the theatrical profession however, but for the readers of our various journals. Members of the profession fall into this category, but they are in the minority. (Using "ball park" figures to give you an idea, it is estimated that Sydney and Melbourne each have 70,000 people who regularly read arts sections.)

Criticism of critics usually goes on the lines of "who do they think they are — God?", and "what are their qualifications?" Lastly the questioning has been more specific (in its suspicion of the media) in general with the profession suggesting that the critic is generally dishonest and that Australia is particularly dishonest. Why don't we have a Sidney Edwards, a Hobson, a Tyrone or a Shaw?

Critics might also ask why Australia doesn't have a Peter Brook, or an Olivier, or Brecht. The profession should be glad we don't have a James, a Lewis, or a Tyrone. They set actors and directors for breakfast — especially self-important colonial ones.

It's a cliché, but you might say that like politicians, a country gets the theatre it deserves, and the critics it deserves. Similarly, once art reflects life, great art usually springs from extreme circumstances in the emotional and political climate of a country. A major example of this recently was the use of Australian writing during the so-called *Whitlam years*. No really great writing emerged and no great critic spring to mind it, but more Australian work was being performed. Critics probably become more anxious to look at it.

This was also bound to happen as the role of newspapers had changed. From showing life up close over the telelens, to their own style, turned to backgrounding and analysis.

An odd, later insight however is that theatre criticism has become almost exclusively the preserve of the daily press.

Since the mid-60s, such as the *Bellman*, *National Times* and *Nation Review*, have cut a back.

The electronic media have not employed critics to any extent. ABC never does a little, the national television comes to it is Bill Collins' *First Commentaries*, and Stuart Wagstaff's introductions to *World Playhouse*.

Most newspapers get the critics they deserve. While Australian critics are not bound by policy in any way, most are aware of the audience they write for, and on their clubs accordingly. An exception to illustrate the point is Hans Furst, the *Sunday Telegraph's* new music critic, who is said to be too "intellectual" for his readers.

There are many occupations I have said — farm, space, and unimportant jobs. Two hundred words, which is some criticism, just about takes care of the name of the show, where it's on, who's in it. Requests for more notes usually fill on deal cars — what's a play to a full page? Besides, as an important political or sporting story. But everybody has occupational and personal hazards. A critic may not be able to run down details of certain playwrights, may neglect the case for generalising on the writing (as I did in my recent ranting). A performer may be distracted, a director capricious. Everybody has blind spots.

But do Australian critics have more than others? Are they "the worst in the world" (Paul Hill, unfortunately, "idiotical") (Ross McDougall who apparently willingly had accepted a national critics award, "behind the scenes" factor Robert Raftery, "uneducated" and "blind to reality" (Helen von der Ploen), "mean and arrogant" (Dorothy Howell), "subjective and unbalanced" (Richard Wherity).

Of course not. The sort of criticism is typical (if insensitive and disappointing) of people whose feelings have been hurt. Nobody likes to be attacked, least of all people who are putting more than just learned think into their professions, but body and soul as well.

You hear that sort of thing in every country from anybody who writes poems and finds he or she has to say displeasure as well.

The point is however, that Australian critics are different from those elsewhere in the world — because they tell theatre just as they see it, without wearing up a mask, without dishonest intellectual tricks. The sort of criticism the Australian profession seems to want is the florid intellectualisation of plays and plays in which all sorts of motives are "discovered" where motives did not exist. All that sort of writing believes in a self-important critic.

Australians are writing for people who need to know what the play is like before paying, and the large sums now being raised for tickets, and those who can't go but enjoy a surrogate opinion. That is their brief. Australian newspapers just aren't

"Has anybody ever seen a dramatic critic in the daytime? Of course not. They come out after dark, up to no good." P.G. Wodehouse

the Critic

interested in anything? Because?"

But there are many shades of critics and criticism, from light to the more serious, and readers become used to the likes and dislikes of their paper's reviewer.

For instance, at the Sydney Opera House one night, I heard a woman tell her companion "well, Kevin Kopp didn't like this, so we should".

There are critics who specialise in script analysis, often who write merely flatter pieces, those who understand directors better than they do writers, but few who write well about acting.

Since the decline of the actor's theatre (when people would see my rubbish if Wolff was playing) and the rise of the playwright's importance, concise writing about acting for general reading is uncommon in a weekly journal like *Theatre* whereas a critic may explain acting on a technical level, but for daily or weekly newspaper you find critics falling back on tired expressions like "terrific", "veritable", "in his element", "well-rounded performance" (what ever that means).

Some comfort may be gained from Shaw (I think who wrote that describing the actor's art was the most difficult art of all).

The most frequent complaint about critics is that they think they are "God" because a notice might appear next to a report of a disaster or political coup, it tends to take on the status of fact instead of opinion.

A review after all is only one person's opinion, based on a come-as-you-are (tired, happy, tired, ill) acting on one performance — the status is any paying customer.

A critic is a professional theatre-goer, whose duties include attending many nights at different performances than any actor or director, considerable reading around the subject, and often, personal experience with a company.

Although from the profession is essential — there is nothing harder than reviewing a friend's work.

There were attempts, stemming from Hamlet, to bring the profession and critics closer together. One or two people thought that critics should sit in on rehearsals to see how directors and actors worked together, developed a show. Others were nervous of the idea.

It was an interesting thought, but more useful for arts promotion than critics. Our business is with the finished product, one should be aware of the means which went into the ends, but not to be too sympathetic to it.

A critic's job is not to destroy the illusion but to enhance it. Where one feels the illusion is flawed, the task is to explain why.

That's fine as theory. It doesn't always work out that way. Writing a fair review is as rare as seeing a brilliant performance — whether you're in Australia, London, New York, Paris or just Poughkeepsie, USA.

Robert Page
an editor of
Theatre Australia

To attempt to put forward a series of formulae by which theatre is to be assessed is as fruitless and misguided as to try to establish a series of rules by which art must be created. Essentially criticism is the art of writing about art, as the American critic G.J. Nathan put it: "Art is a partnership between the artist and the critic-critic. The former creates, the latter re-creates."

If criticism is the art of writing about art then its materials are words and its technique appeal the way in which those words are put together. The importance of style then is paramount. "Style is not an attainable quality of writing, it is the writing itself."

The best reviews are light, flowing and complete, reflecting the consensus of an attuned mind rather than mindlessly harping wearily thought. "Unfortunately many of our criticism is born stale", lamented Shaw. Solid comment is dressed in the right form of words. Beyond that, however criticism is the translation into language of a whole range of impressions which comprise the theatrical experience, the best critics reflect something of the flavour and atmosphere of the performance in their work.

"Criticism is designed to state facts — charmingly, gracefully if possible — but still facts. It is not designed to enthrall, mislead or convert" (Nathan). Yet many critics see themselves only as lawyers of their own opinion in their role as publicists for the theatre industry. To reduce criticism to only the view of an individual is to limit its importance entirely. From the critics standpoint such an argument is really as quaint, a way of avoiding (so far as human beings can in artistic or any) "objective" judgement.

Theatre can be assessed in terms of what the playwright hopes to achieve and what the production realises (or even betters), groupings can be poor, actors readable, lighting misapplied, costumes of the wrong period and so on. Opinions in the many part of being a critic, the best part is to be reasonably open to sound logic.

Another view (often from the same group) is that of the "have-nothing" school of critics. The argument is that nothing should be taught out about a production, not the script, read before a performance in order to be as clearly just another member of the audience as possible.

Yet this can only be true for a professional, inevitably a critic must learn more of theatre, he cannot avoid doing so, and as such he can never claim that not preparing himself is anything other than an excuse for genuine lack of taste or interest. If in general the critic cannot help being more informed than the audience then he should develop his knowledge and discernment, he may then be in a position

to point out the worth of a production beyond that of the way it is received by the public. Otherwise why should his views be published?

Why not say other member of the audience? Or better why not put those who have seen the play? As Shaw said rather bluntly of the critic in relation to his audience "it is his business to educate these idiots not to educate them". Respect for a critic is respect for his knowledge and developed power of discrimination not for his self-optimisation or vanity.

Knowledge and experience allow the critic to recognise that which is the contribution of the writer, that of director, actor, designer and so on, the difference between or consistency of intention and realisation, and even something of previous productions, other work of the actors and director, and the rest of the play-right's career.

Too many reviews rely too heavily on a dogged statement of the story where clearly this is only one (and usually a minor) element. The theatre is a collaborative art form, to assess it is to assess the work of a number of artists — actors, playwrights, directors and designers and sometimes choreographers and musicians.

It should be approached as a series of various talents, the difficulty is to find the synthesis which leads one from the complex organism which constitutes a piece of theatre to the assessment of it in words. The way may be via a central theme, a metaphor or a major piece of business — though with a sense of the creative work as a whole being preserved.

The cry is often of not enough space but, within obvious limits, restriction of the number of words can be seen as a virtue, not a factor allowing only superficial comments but (like language) one that "concentrates the mind wonderfully". The allowing of pedantry has its own dangers.

What criticism needs is depth of perception, richness of response and close attention to the performance on the part of its practitioners. The work should have sufficient descriptive value to allow audience to choose whether a play is for them, not be told whether or not to see it because of the opinion of one largely untrained individual. The most appropriate level of discourse should be adopted in conveying assessment of a production, with no attempt to patronise or ponder to a supposed readership.

As a writer the critic is duty bound to produce a piece as interesting as he can make it, as a theatre writer he should have the kind of excitement about the plays which carries itself through his work. Charles Marowitz commented, "the best criticism is criticism which because of its spontaneity and substantial materiality has the effect of personal diary."

The Edgleys: a theatre family

When commercial theatre is mentioned, one immediately thinks of J.C. Williamson, Russ Brodusk, Harry M. Miller (has he retired from the scene?) — and the Edgleys.

Although the Williamson name has been the front for various theatrical companies for a number of years, the original Mr Williamson died in 1915. Brodusk has been a power on the commercial theatre scene since the forties, Miller only a familiar name in the field in the sixties, whilst the sevenies have introduced Eric Dore. The Edgley name, though, has been known to audiences for more than 50 years, with ever-increasing importance.

The company, known for many years as Edgley and Dore, and today as Michael Edgley International, started as an English comic duo — Eric Edgley and Clem Dore — making its debut in Australia as a Melbourne pantomime, *Richard the Ruler* for J.C.W.'s in 1910. The two were actually brothers, born in Birmingham, whose real surname was White. Their mother, as Elizabeth Wharton, had in a child born on the balustrade in Covent Garden, and was principal dancer in a pantomime when she met her future husband, who was a member of the orchestra. He was Richard White, a professional accountant who also happened to be a talented cellist, and some times played in theatre orchestras.

As her husband's work, Mr White (as

Elizabeth was affectionately called) retired from the stage upon marriage, but later was able to offer practical advice to her children. In addition to Eric and Clem, there were also Leslie, Dick and Dorothy who took to the stage, but who retained the name of White. The line is fast joined a well-known troupe, The Lancashire Lads, who could boast of having provided training ground for Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel.

During the First World War Eric and Clem gained experience with English music and pantomime companies. While appearing as brother's men in *Cinderella* they were spotted by a N.W. agent and contacted to appear in Australia. The brothers were popular with audiences, liked the country and decided to stay.

Before leaving England, Clem and Eric had worked in a topical revue company known as *The Revolvers*, and they decided to form a similar company in Australia, calling it *The Mysterious Frocker*. It was founded in Perth in 1921, and Dick Leslie and Dorothy White also joined them. In the cast, as well, were the wives of Eric and Leslie, dancer Phyllis Anson, and Nell McGowan.

Apparently the brothers had hit upon a magic formula and *The Mysterious Frocker* in various cities, toured Australia for more than 10 years.

In early 1930 Phyllis Edgley died when

her son, Philip, was born. Edna Lumsden, a young dancer with the company, took charge of the baby.

With *The Mysterious Frocker* so successful in this country, the brothers decided to take an all-Australian revue company to England, the first time such a thing had occurred. Unfortunately, its London opening coincided with the death of George V, it was not well received, and turned out to be a financial failure. Desperate then, the brothers remained in London, and in 1939 participated in the first television broadcast from the stage of the London Coliseum.

Ten years after the death of his wife, Eric, re-married. This time it was to Edna Lumsden. At the time of their marriage they were appearing together in variety at the Empire Theatre, Hoxton.

By now the Second World War had started, and the brothers decided it was time for them to return to Australia. After appearing in pantomime, they were seen at Sydney's Theatre Royal in *Farouk Suley* in 1940, followed by *Thamara* in 1942. In December 1943, Eric's second son, Michael, was born, and a few years later, Christine.

The last known saw the brothers reviving *The Mysterious Frocker* type of show, initially in Hobart. Again the festival proved successful and once more they toured Australia with it.



Eric Edgley and Clem Dore 1914

'Make no mistake about it. The Edgleys do not just book a show and wait for the returns to flow in. For them it is sheer hard work'

They were back in Perth, at His Majesty's Theatre, by the early 1930's, and decided to take a lease on the theatre. Young Philip was now appearing on stage alongside his father and uncle.

From 1930 to 1936 Edgley and Basse Attractions appeared in Perth at His Majesty's, presenting locally prohibited shows, as well as attractions from the eastern states. Then in 1935 Glenn died suddenly here (or back as he was usually called by friends). Edgley carried on, aided by Edna and Philip.

Basse first observed that the trend now was for entrepreneurs in the eastern states to import companies from overseas, which were usually successful. With the thought in his head that he, too, could import attractions, Eric made an overseas trip in 1930. It was when in Russia he hit upon an idea — strongly not thought of by other managers — which ultimately would advance the fortunes of the family firm. He would import Russian companies.

The first company, in 1932, was billed as the Moscow State Variety Theatre Company and featured acrobats from the Bolshoi Ballet and Opera, jugglers, acrobats, jugglers, magicians, musicians, folk dancers and specialty acts from the Moscow State Circus. Aware of the risks involved, Edgley was backed when JCW and Anne Stevens agreed to share some of the (tiny) financial burden. The same year he brought out a second company, this time consisting of 24 star performers from the Bolshoi Ballet. Both enterprises were big box-office hits.

Over the next few years the Edgley family introduced to Australians — who never seemed to tire of them — Russian companies, who only to return again and again, their success always reflected in the healthy box-office returns. Then there was the Canadian State Dance Company, the David Solomon Company, the Bolshoi Dance Company of Moscow, the Orpheo Balalaika Orchestra, the Moscow Polish Song and Dance Company, the Moscow Dance Ensemble of the USSR and perhaps the biggest of them all, the Great Moscow Circus.

In February 1962, after a short illness, Eric Edgley died. Now more than ever, Edgley and Basse was a family concern. Philip, Edna and Michael were full-time directors, but it was young Michael who apparently was at the head. Philip, though, as artistic director, set off to Moscow to negotiate new attractions, and met the Prima. One result has personally talking about performances he had seen at the Moscow Arts Theatre Company, regarded that it would be impossible to bring it to Australia.

Philip had been stage-struck and while at school was well known on radio in a

feature about a wartime crooner, David Morris Australia. He performed with people like Peter Finch and Ron Randall and scored for JCW's in 1938-9 in the movie *Far from the Madding Crowd*. In the early days of the imported Russian shows Philip would act as emcee and introduce acts from the stage. Philip is no longer with the Edgley organisation. Because of ill-health he had to bow out seven or eight years ago.

In 1971 J.C. Williamson Theatres — which had led the box theatre field for so many years — were showing signs of decline, and obviously some sort of blood transfusion was required. In September that year a merger took place between JCW's and the Edgleys, the new company being called Williamson-Edgley Theatres Ltd., and headed by the dynamic Michael, then only 37. JCW's had a 50 per cent share in the new company, the Edgleys 40 per cent. One member of the board was Bruce Gympie, then with the Channel 7 TV Network.

At the time Michael Edgley made sweeping changes at JCW's. He cut away a lot of the dead wood and (at some point) quite reluctantly reattached a number of JCW employees who had been with 'The Firm' a great many years. Naturally such moves were not popular. But Michael was unhappy working in the Melbourne JCW offices. For the amount of work he was getting out of it all, he felt he was not getting enough out. For him it was all a tremendous worry involving enormous responsibility, and basically he had no real interest in mounting musicals and plays, but wanted to return to producing specialists. After 13 months, therefore, the partnership was dissolved. It was all very amicable. The time spent with JCW's was probably good experience for Michael and certainly for JCW's, since they shakled up their highest profits for a decade.

So now it was back to his own company. By this time Michael was surrounded by the hard-working team which has worked with him ever since, almost on a partnership basis. Mother Edna and sister Christine of course. Christine's career as a dancer was cut short when, during the tour of *Danny on Parade* while in Adelaide, the actual apparatus on which she was performing cracked in the wings and she was injured. Then there is Michael's wife, Jean, in charge of the company's national publicity, and most certainly one of the best publicists in the country.

Over the past 18 years Michael's right hand man has been entrepreneur Andrew Gault. Showing Andrew's performance as the Antial Dodger in *Oliver!* and the young Prince in *The King and I*, one notices the stage has probably lost a very useful actor. Andrew now can speak fluent Russian, will shortly be making his debut

visit to the USSR, and is married to a former Russian ballerina An-Chel Gausev. There is, too, David Petrovich, manager of the company's financial affairs, who selects attractions from the People's Republic of China. Another is an JCW man Wayne Stevens, who opened the company's current season, makes regular visits to the U.S., and has his eye firmly fixed on current pop-in-the-trends.

Another generation of Edgleys is on the way. Mark Michael's (the son) did not by his first marriage, and his very daughters, Sasha and Cops. Already Mark appears to be taking an interest in things.

Make no mistake about it. The Edgleys do not just book a show and wait for the returns to flow in. For them it is sheer hard work. Members of the family, as well as Andrew and Wayne, will accompany tours throughout Australia, frequently working around the clock, never taking days off. One recalls the Melbourne opening of the Great Circus of Russia earlier this year, when all members of the organisation seemed to be actively engaged in shows. During the performance, one saw Michael himself running around, giving rapid instructions, and even personally helping to tighten ropes.

When in 1970 Michael was made a MBE for his contribution to the performing arts in Australia (the youngest Australian ever to receive an honour for himself), he had only earned it in 1975 he was named 'Citizen of the Year' in Western Australia.

Today Michael is mounting more and more shows in association with Brian Brookbank, managing director of J.C. Williamson Productions (of which Michael is also a director). The smash hit *A Chorus Line* is a joint production, so too are the plays *Fanny Hill* and *Forever Young*. The Edgley organisation is also presenting several acts in collaboration with other managers. Last year was the company's best ever, grossing around 35 million at the box office. This year the figure is expected to be something like \$40 million.

Talk to Michael today and one realises he is a tough business man, firmly in the game for the money. Certainly he admits being interested only in presenting big-name international talent, with no room for the unknown or experimental.

Sadly, on the face of it, the Edgley organisation does not seem very interested in presenting Australian originated shows (although they are presenting with JCW's, *The Immortals* and *40 Thin Japs*). However, in 1972 Michael did negotiate an annual price of \$5,000 for the performing arts in Western Australia, likely to become a national opera in next year.

The Two Macbeths

David Gyger



Unlike Giuseppe Verdi's last two operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, which are also based on Shakespeare plays, his *Macbeth* — which is now playing at the Sydney Opera House — is decidedly not a masterpiece. But for that very reason, perhaps, it is a fascinating object lesson in the complex business of transferring great drama to the operatic stage.

For despite its flaws — and there are many, both musical and dramatic — Verdi's *Macbeth* is a major milestone in the history of opera, and in its hour-long, a marvellous re-creation of Shakespeare in a new medium. The sleepwalking scene, Act IV Scene 2 of the opera, is an almost exact translation into Italian of Act V Scene 1 of the play; the banquet scene of the opera is very close to the banquet scene of the play down to the appearance of the murderers and the reappearance of Banquo's ghost.

Yet Act I Scene 2 of the opera is a clever amalgamation of no less than six scenes of the play (those between Shakespeare's Act I Scene 5 and Act II Scene 1), encompassing all the important scenes between Lady Macbeth's rebuke of Macbeth's tears describing his first encounter with the witches and the discovery of Duncan's murder in one continuous chunk of stage action. No sooner has Lady Macbeth read the letter, and mailed it over in an arm, than Macbeth enters and almost as he bids the King, who crosses the stage without uttering a word (in the opera this is a non-speaking part). How soon follows his self-venge but almost immediately Macbeth returns to sing his noted soliloquy, "Mac is affetto un pugno? Falso a me volto?" ("Is this a dagger?"). No sooner has he ended on his famous rhyming couplet, "Non solbro, Duncan! E squillo orrore/ che ad uolo è d'orrore a me raffioro" ("Hark a not, Duncan!"), than Lady Macbeth comes in to muse a few lines and prepare to receive him back to report, "Tutto è fatto" ("I have done the deed").

Thus follows a marvellous duet between the Macbeths, a cleverly and sparsely an-Shakespearean amalgamation of several bits and pieces from the play, chopped and changed about so as to satisfy the operagoer's craving for vocal confrontations — not to mention the opera composer's craving to have an opportunity to display his skill in creating complex concerted ensemble passages where vocal lines can interweave in a fascinating webwork of oppositions and confusions and blend into passages. Before the curtain falls on this extraordinary scene, the murder has been discovered (but without the time-killing disruption of the drunken porter's comedy and nonsense in night has engaged in a long-winded and repetitious series of stock lamentations and petitions to the Almighty to hang the perpetrator of the *via dead* to justice.

Shakespearean poets by rare, no doubt, will be wincing at their hair at the description of such anachronism to great drama, the Bard himself, totally unfamiliar as he inevitably was with the conventions of

16th-century opera, is no doubt, tanning over on his grave. It may be some consolation to them to learn that Verdi, who, far from being an ignorant music-prince-wacko, was an avid Shakespearean student, he was very concerned indeed to do justice to the original drama when he first tackled *Macbeth* at the age of 34, doing most of the libretto himself in prose and then handing it on to adapt for vocal fashion. Yes, first, for *Macbeth* is one of those problematical operas which exist in two versions separated by a time gap of 15 years — the first the product of Verdi's young manhood, the second of his full maturity. The revision was prompted by plans to stage the work in Paris in 1865, where it falls to do rigid war against his wishes, at least to start with, Verdi bowed to the western and enlightened ear into Act III, the opera's second widest scene which is an extended scene of Shakespeare's Act IV Scene 1 with the addition of a mad-as-Shakespearean question-and-answer scene between the Macbeths. Lady Macbeth having inexplicably tracked down her husband in the witches' caverns to her pernicious complicity to find out what the bugs have been producing since. At the same time, he also deleted a dying scene for Macbeth in the last scene.

Yet of course one can dwell too much on such flaws in an opera which after all has one claim to be a masterpiece, and such is the context of your average run-of-the-mill 16th-century operatic misadventure, even its imperfect libretto is at least far average quality and maybe a little better than that and the problem of condensed can involve in getting any spoken play down to the dimensions of an opera libretto are monumental. Admittedly, *Macbeth* is a short play by Shakespeare's standards, but this only means that, say, one needs not two-thirds rather than four-fifths of the original.

In fact, Verdi's opera gains a good deal of dramatic unity by eliminating a number of scenes and telescoping others in the manner detailed above with respect to the arrival and murder of Duncan, the five acts and 28 scenes of the original play are pruned to an economic four acts and 14 scenes in the opera.

There is a good deal of literature on a comparative study of the two *Macbeths* but, having detailed the main points of divergence of Verdi and Shakespeare in purely dramatic, textual terms, it is necessary to hasten to point out that this is merely a specific, though quite useful, converse illustrating the difference between spoken drama and opera. Few if any opera librettos can stand on their own two feet in spoken play texts, again that is very good is a partnership of text and music, each of which complements — indeed, is vital to thorough understanding of — the other.

One would find it impossible for opera to deal satisfactorily with complex subplots of characterisation simply because it cannot get enough words across to an

audience affectively enough, but sometimes opera does indeed succeed — even with standing audiences — in doing just that. The reason for this is the constructive power of the music itself and to measure its capacity ability to maintain us into the sort of semi-willing suspension of disbelief that makes us forget, in Act I Scene 2 of Verdi's *Macbeth*, that 12 hours or more simply over have elapsed during the course of a single scene of continuous stage action which takes little more than half an hour to perform. And music can also, of course, contradict or reinforce a singer's words almost subliminally, as in a few bars of orchestral introduction an overpowering mood that might require pages of spoken dialogue.

Verdi's *Macbeth* translates us in this on such scenes because of its very perfection, the fact that it is such an astonishing mixture of marvellous opera and musical and dramatic inventiveness verging on the absurd. Having shown Shakespeare's plan in its very bones — by and large a study of the transition of the two Macbeths through an all-consuming obsession to achieve and defend absolute power — it then proceeds to embellish and externalise Lady Macbeth's character as shrewd vocal traits while underscoring and priming Macbeth's character down to a bare minimum. His great monologue, "If it be thus a dagger", is never just off the ground as a piece of vocal display, but one proper aria in the post-last scene of the opera, just before the death of Lady Macbeth. Yet he spends an enormous amount of time on stage, and there is a brooding power in his music which gives him the opportunity to be every inch his wife's equal in dramatic terms. It is just as tough and demanding a role as Lady Macbeth, if in quite a different way.

But facts and all, Verdi's *Macbeth* is a masterpiece in operatic libretto for the new emphasis it places on dramatic aspects of the art form as opposed to vocal display. In *Macbeth*, Verdi did not succeed nearly as well as he was to succeed much later in his career, but there is a good deal of evidence, none from his own lips, that he had a clear vision of what he was after. Furthermore, as a celebrated young composer (only 34 years old) he was pretty clearly feeling his oats in the production field, issuing very precise instructions, for instance, as to how the appearance of the kingly should appear in that last witches scene and making provocative, even outrageous, statements about casting. Objection to the choice of one Madame Tachias, who had been suggested for the role of Lady Macbeth, he wrote to the director of the relevant production: "This may sound absurd, but Madame Tachias is a handsome woman with a beautiful face, and I want Lady Macbeth to be ugly and evil — Madame Tachias has the voice of an angel, and Lady Macbeth's should be that of a devil."

Of course, Verdi didn't really mean all

that to be taken literally. Yet it was a sign of the times, and one of the important reasons why Verdi's *Macbeth* is such an operatic landmark, that he felt moved to visit such opinions, to plead, in effect, for adequate consideration of the dramatic aspects of opera. Even today we are still plagued by far too many opera productions that assume that first capturing all that matters.

Another sign of the times was the fact that, by standards of the mid-19th century, almost of universal Verdi demanded — and got — for *Macbeth*. Specifically the Act I duet following the murder of Duncan, which as supposed to have had 251 runs through before the dress rehearsal.

John Shaw and Elizabeth Connell, who are playing the Macbeths in the current John Copley production for the Australian Opera, admit when their narrative is recalled to the surface of their memory, but then, we are talking at a very early stage of rehearsal — before Copley to the conductor, John Prendard, have had a chance to ask 51 rehearsals of them.

How did they approach the opera, when they first tackled the job of learning their immense roles in Shakespeare with alterations and deletions, or as a separate work of art? Their answers are quite different.

"I went straight to Verdi and considered it as a separate work of art," says Connell. "I got it from the opera — Verdi's stage directions are incredibly detailed — but going back to Shakespeare helps you to understand the role."

Shaw recalls that he first began to study the role of Macbeth at the suggestion of a former musical director of the Australian Opera, Edward Downes. "I went out and bought a Shakespeare and read it avidly before starting to learn the role at a lightning pace." He, of course, is now an experienced operatic Macbeth (having first sung the role in 1968), where Connell is making her debut season as the part of the wife.

Shaw admits Verdi's *Macbeth* is episodic, but feels it is the best of all the Shakespearean operas written to date — barring of course *Otello* and *Falstaff*, which are acknowledged masterpieces. "Macbeth the opera is grossly under-rated," he says. "But Macbeth, in particular, is a very hard role to play. It makes immense emotional, as well as vocal, demands on you. It takes a lot more out of you than, say, *Regina* does. Dramatic involvement is absolutely essential or it will collapse. Many opera performances can be judged on big display parts, that's no way you can do that with Macbeth."

Partly this is a fault of the work itself, particularly in the revised version which is almost always performed today, for in the original Lady Macbeth was degraded and externalised while Macbeth's most part was reduced, internalising it even more than it was originally.

"As the meter shifts, too, she gets more of a go than he does," admits Connell.

totally out of character, for an instant, in her sympathy for her stage husband. Before adding, with a trace of the steel you one feels will increasingly dominate their stage relationship as it continues: "I peg you up all the time, don't I?"

And Shaw, of course, must agree: "I'm looking forward to doing it," confides Candel.

"Genuinely under-rated," maintains Shaw. "Of course we're not talking about a masterpiece," says John Copley over a plate of cold seafood and a glass of white wine, leaning back in comfortable Marlboro, or perhaps the vice as the Opera House studies "Or if it is, it's a very flawed one."

He thinks a minute, then goes on: "The director's job is to gloss over the absurdities . . . fill in the holes with nuggets of gold . . . like a deacon. It goes if it's done with panache . . . you don't give the people a chance to think."

Verdi's *Macbeth* has its problems, he admits, but really, he adds, it's a very straight-forward piece. "What it needs is a lot of expertise. It's not one for amateurs, but it's no *La Traviata*," says Copley.

The stage? "The banquet scene is one. By now, the Macbeths are very nervous. Nobody is at ease; nobody wanted to come to this banquet, but they were forced to. I hate productions which make it too jolly." And the inherent problems of Lady Macbeth's drinking song can be a problem, a director must make quite clear the dramatic irony of her trying to maintain

the good humor of her guests at the last of the virtual disintegration of their host before their very eyes.

Just to mention the scene involving the murder of Banquo: "That's the most difficult," says Copley. "What do you do with Fleance?"

But Copley, who first did the piece as an amateur production for the Athens Festival of 1968, is more concerned about budget problems than problems of direction this time round. "We wanted to have a massive, strong, open set . . . no black and gold, no glitter, just a massive, atmospheric, necessary location. Nothing to stop, no spectacle."

"I feel agonised," he adds dramatically, "that Australian audiences won't glower . . . something they can clap. But there's nothing light in the piece, it wouldn't be."

He is having trouble getting the sort of atmosphere he wants with Marlboro budget problems are to blame. "If things don't perk up in the budget department . . ."

He encourages himself: "You can do Macbeth on a bare stage, you know, if you have marvellous actors."

Meanwhile, back at the headquarters of the Australian Opera, a couple of miles inland from the Opera House, the designer of the new AO Macbeth, Stefan Lazzaridis, is supervising a mass firing of chamber costumes. Just about everything is black, just the old button or trim stands out to catch the eye, even the relief is swatched away under a long black cloak

almost before it has a chance to register.

"It's a black opera," says Lazzaridis. Every scene takes place at night . . . but of course that makes it much easier and more economical to design. We're doing it in a strong, tough-forward way, creating a very oppressive world and at the same time giving the impression the two main characters are trapped and isolated and lonely . . . alone."

The murder plots Macbeth and Lady Macbeth — this is the end of their relationship. They wouldn't have had sex after that. They're hopelessly apart, each going toward personal destruction."

Before designing this Macbeth, Lazzaridis studied the Shakespeare original. "There are a lot of changes of balance in the opera," he says, "places where the emphasis has been shifted. It would have been a much greater opera if it had been written later in Verdi's career. It was too serious and savage a subject for what he was doing then. . . . But even so, it was much better than most of the operas he was writing at that stage of his career. What saves it is the intensity, the sure feeling."

"Of course there are difficulties with a work like *Macbeth*, and you can't ignore the fact of their existence. But the stage does work . . . it's very exciting, athletic. Often painful."

"You have to see it from Verdi's point of view, not Shakespeare's," he says, giving the impression he's doing just that right now.

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Over the past 140 years Sydney has seen some two dozen commercial theatre sites in the Central Business District. Disappearing the Wayne, who was originally built as a cinema for Morris Pictures Ltd, as a provision by J.C. Williamson Theatres

to make something out of it, theatre has been one of them. In that case, the 19th century in one case, and 120 years ago. The last theatre in the Sydney, and the famous in it, the theatre, the 19th century theatre.

drive into the park of the 19th century. Road and in it. December was the theatre's last of which have been to reveal.

Ross Thorne Sydney's Theatres Part 1



Theatre Royal Sydney, Brisbane built by James McIlwain, only, during from 1851

Only a small part of the new Theatre Royal is the MLC Centre complex (King and Castlereagh Streets and Market Place) built on the original site of the first theatre and its subsequent replacements until 1972. The original site located Castlereagh Street with an east-west axis, it later acquired a side entrance through a building in King Street. The latest mid twentieth-century colonial style building is frequently, but incorrectly, published as the front of the Theatre Royal.

The first Theatre Royal was named the dynasty under the name of Prince of Wales in 1855, being designed for Joseph Wyatt by Henry Robertson, who had earlier years previously designed Wyatt's Royal Victoria Theatre (opened 1838) in Pitt



The Theatre Royal Sydney, Brisbane built by James McIlwain, only, during from 1851

Street. The capacity of the Royal was 1250 persons in a house divided into four tiers, 100 stalls, two circles of large boxes and a gallery. However we must not be deceived into thinking that it was a large theatre by today's standards. Its stage was conventional being 60 feet wide behind the proscenium and 87 feet deep from the flylights but the pit was only 60 feet wide by 70 feet deep, thus allowing only 24 square feet of floor area per person. Compared to today's 5 to 3.5 square feet per person this accommodation was cramped, but certainly not venustially so for the time.

Melbourne's Argus announced the cost of this "splendid building" as 10,000 pounds, but in 1860 it was reduced to when raised for only 8,000 pounds. A year before its completion there occurred an event quite unusual in the annals of theatre history — a strike by the actors. This industrial dispute of November 1859 concerned the allegedly devious methods by which an entrepreneur, Charles Peck, was attempting to gain a monopoly of Sydney's theatres. It was claimed he was using vulgar subterfuge, rightfully due to stage and orchestra performers for the purpose of obtaining the leases of Sydney's other two theatres.

The final straw was broken by his demand that all the company take a reduction in salary of 25% for the following five weeks. The dispute dragged well into 1860, the year that saw the disappearance of the first theatre on this site. Four fire engines and heavy men could not avert complete destruction on the 1st October of that year.

The second Prince of Wales was built to a "prize design" by J.H. Hilly for a Mr Fitzgerald. Sourcing, from contemporary descriptions, to have the same modern model on it, opened its doors to the public on 25 May 1863. It was this theatre which was removed the link to King Street by constructing the stable entrance between two shops. This allowed the pit patrons, according to social custom of the time, to be segregated from the dress and upper circle patrons. The gallery patrons were sensibly isolated from the time they stepped off Castlereagh Street.



The Theatre Royal Sydney, Brisbane built by James McIlwain, only, during from 1851

Lyster's Royal Italian and English Opera Company performed in this theatre and stage realism was beginning to be an attraction as well. In 1863, in 1865 in Lawrence, there was, according to the Sydney Morning Herald, a "correct model of a genuine Mississippi Steamboat ever built last long with all its machinery in perfect working order". Early one Saturday morning in January 1877 the Prince of Wales Opera House and adjacent buildings were one "immense incandescent mass lighting up the city all around". The theatre was almost entirely consumed. The next theatre, The Royal, opened in December 1875. It was also designed by J.H. Hilly, being again of similar dimensions to the other two buildings, except there were now only three levels, providing more headroom for patrons. Some of the walls and structure existed for the next 90 years although the exterior design changed.

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Celebrating Marlowe

KING EDWARD THE SECOND

CLIFF GILLIAM

King Edward The Second by Christopher Marlowe. The Hole in the Wall Theatre, Perth, West Australia. Director, John Milson, designer, Graham Mathews. Peter Gosselin, Sir John of Humeau, Earl of Lancaster, Lightborne, Richard Williams, three poor men, Ivan King, Mary Hane, David Holmes, King Edward the Second, Robert Van Machelberg, Lord Mortimer, Bishop of Coventry, Edgar Mortally, Earl of Lancaster, herald, an abbot, Gurney, Bill Mawse, Earl of Pembroke, Spencer, Mortimer, Alan Fletcher, Edmund, Earl of Kent, Phil Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, Baskin, Earl of Arundel, Ivan King, Queen Isabella, Joan Sydney, Lady Margaret De Clare, Mary Hane, Prince Edward, a queen, David Holmes.

Perth theatre audiences have been extremely well served by the Hole-in-the-Wall during 1977. Under director John Milson, the policy of the last couple of years has been confirmed which has meant that, along with the odd semi-first money spinner, productions have been given of many plays whose box-office potential has been uncertain, to say the least, but which have had the merit of keeping us constantly alert both to the potential and the value of the live theatre as a medium.

This policy has meant that we have seen new plays by new writers, both Australian and foreign (see, for instance, particularly of Peter Porter and Czeslaw Niganda) and also the less-commercial masterworks by established writers, but we have always seen plays which offer more than *Woe* and *Hamlet*, and productions which invariably are interesting and committed to live theatre.

As it has begun, so it goes on. After a first week season of O'Neill's mature masterpieces, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, in a production brilliantly directed by Raymond Givens, (and featuring a level of performance from Mavis Treado, Machelberg, Hinchcock, and Matthew Askeford and Moody, consistently higher than anything I've ever seen in years here in Perth), John Milson has followed up with the strongly rejected Marlowian shreds-of-tragedy *Edward II*.

I have never really understood why *Edward II* is so infrequently performed, since it seems to me the Marlowian play best suited to modern taste. It belongs of course to the tradition of the chronicle play and so fact detail, "the noblest things and lamentable death" of its spontaneous protagonist over some fairly plain.

Yet it does so with amazing speed and economy, without ever slipping into documentary totem, and it accomplishes this largely by its cunning dual focus — a focus both on the king himself and the conflict between his nature and the demands of his position, and on the forces ranged against that nature as collected and composed in the remarkable Mortimer.

The glowing hyperbole characteristic of Marlowe in plays like *Tamburlaine* and *Dr Faustus* is lacking in *Edward II*, having been replaced by a rhetoric better suited to the pace of the action, laser-focused and enormously effective in its delineation of the aim and thrust of the conflict between the king and his barons.

Milson's production takes advantage of the quality which gives the play its pace, the montage of brief scenes swelling toward major crises such as the execution of Gaveston, and the abdication of the king. Another useful collaboration with designer Graham Mathews has allowed him to set the action in a space suggestive of a medieval thrust room, but with different levels to the floor which allow for transitions to battlefields or the court of France with remarkable ease. Shells in lighting turn the palace of chame and the portals of time with elegant cut-outs from throne room to dungeon and torturer chamber in less than a moment.

The play exhibits a symmetry in structure, Mortimer rising as Edward falls, which is echoed throughout this production, from the warm heat of the set, to the careful orchestration of scenes of confrontation between Edward and his barons (which would easily have become messy in the small area of the Hole's playing space), down to the masterstroke of having Richard Williams's double the parts of Gaveston and Lightborne, the king's lover and murderer respectively.

Milson made extremely effective use of only 11 players to fill the twenty-five speaking parts of the play. Performances were generally strong, but much of the force and power of this production came from the assured playing of Robert Van Machelberg as the king and Edgar Mortally as Mortimer. Van Machelberg brought a peculiar vulnerability to the role of Edward II "Pier grieved" by his passion for Gaveston, and later valiantly provocative in his choice of Spencer as a new partner.

Deep in politics and politics in his attempt at heroism, Edward II, is a character difficult to sympathise with until he is forced to suffer a grossly cruel imprisonment and death. Van Machelberg managed to gain the audience's sympathy from the beginning, being absolutely convincing about the forces of the king's passion for Gaveston.

His appearance in a simple white robe of mourning after Gaveston is exiled again was truly harrowing. He appeared as a medieval man, a first figure in white with a beard of "formal cut", and the entire performance was marked by this sense of stylisation, his movement particularly be-



Edgar Mortally and Joan Sydney in *Edward the Second*

ing a matter of a graceful flow from scenes past to scenes posed.

The contrast between the long and the tortured creature writing in the cramped of his imprisonment, curled like a child in the arms of his executioner, spreadeagled under a table, waiting to receive a merciful death, brought an added dimension of horror to what is itself one of the most harrowing scenes in English dramatic literature. In this scene and in the abolition scene, Van Mankelshberg proved once and for all that he possesses the technique, the control and the skills of a master of his profession.

Balancing him was another master, Edgar Metcalfe. Physically compact, finely determined in both his hatred and his ambition, Metcalfe's Montrose was entirely convincing, both proud and vengeful. There was no doubt Machiavellian, but a blunt and forceful man of many parts, the love scenes with Isabella revealing tenderness too as part of his range of passions.

Joan Sydney played Isabella, the queen caught between the contempt of her beloved King and the ambition of 'poor old Montrose'. This is a difficult role, since the change in the queen's attitude to Edward after her return with Montrose from France seems too rapidly accomplished in terms of the action of the play. The memory of his debilitation and frustrations, her successful fidelity in the first two acts clashes violently with her callousness in the last. If the play has a weakness it is this one, yet Joan Sydney made of it also something memorable.

Richard Williams took the part of Garvonia, as well as doubling in the odd French or English lord, and winning at the end of the play as Lightborn, the ironically aptly named murderer. As Peter Ormrod, Williams was excellent. — John Strong, *Starline*, determinedly moral, his presence gave substance to the conflict between King and Barons over the proper government of the realm.

Garvonia is intelligent and passionate, self-dramatically posed perhaps, but Williams also made him big enough to trigger and contain in a language. With Van Mankelshberg he established an empathy in the playing that carried over beautifully into the last scenes, where, at the couple's saddest, Lightborn, the consummate actor of subtle deaths, he echoed earlier scenes of tenderness between King and Montrose while comforting his intended victim.

Many of the minor roles were doubled by Alan Fletcher, Bill Milnes and Ivan King and their playing was generally competent and in key with the style of the production. Ivan King made a delightful cameo of the improbably witty scholar-opportunist Bedlack.

John Milson's programme notes announce this production as a celebration of Christopher Marlowe — and so it is. It is also a personal triumph for Milson, who made in this particular chronicle play a tragedy of passion which could be effec-

tively done in a style of hot-house as many such as that encouraged by the dimensions of the Holm-in-the-Wall Theatre. We are fortunate to have had the chance to see this play at all — to see it so successfully done is to get away with the trend.

Two plays from the 'Golden Age of American Drama'

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

OF MICE AND MEN

MARGOT LUKE

Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene O'Neill. Holm in the Wall Theatre, Perth, WA. Opened 27 August 1977. Director and designer, Raymond Onsdon.

James Tyrone, Neville Tindle, Mary Caran Tyrone, Margaret Ashford Jones, Helen van Mankelshberg, Edmund, Gerald Fletcher, Carlson, Julia Moody.

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck. Playhouse, Perth, WA. Opened 22 September 1977.

Director, Anne Neume. Designer, See Maxwell George, Trevor Hart Leslie, Robert Fuggetter, Cindy, Colin Burgess, The Moss, Geoff Gibbs, Carole, Martin Jones, Carley's wife, Keith Taylor, Sam, Leslie Wright, Carlson, Alan Cassell, Whit, Ian David, Cooke, Peter Rowley.

Looking back, one can only describe it as a forgotten Golden Age in the history of American Drama. More exactly the plays had been noted by later, more sophisticated, more cerebral writers. Now both O'Neill's family drama and Steinbeck's ghost painting are rediscovered and prove to be relevant as poems, chronicled the more for their "otherness". They are unsharpened of full-blooded emotion. They take their time to establish their theme without sensuously peering over their shoulder to see if the audience is getting restless. They achieve a solidity and weight that goes beyond the stuffiest (hardly, in the case of Steinbeck precisely by passing it), and involve us in the business of being human rather than in using us to appreciate brilliant studies on the human condition.

There are dangers, of course: both of the plays teeter occasionally on the brink of melodrama and one, for an actor playing to a cynical metropolitan audience, is extremely difficult to sustain. Large-hearted characters, except as caricatures, have gone out of fashion, as has compassion (Dionysian Lenore would be unthinkable in a contemporary play, except as a stylistic figure — Kasper, at the bars of *Inner Voices* — or as a sick joke. Similarly the

collection of twisted wrecks in the O'Neill play would be impossible to present straight by a post-Orson and post-Albee writer. They would need to be seen as examples of American Gothic.

There is, despite thematic commonalities, no comparison in the size or scope of the two plays. *Long Day's Journey* is a gem of the drama — *Of Mice and Men* is a literary curiosity, a novelist's venture into the realm of theatre. The one is panoramic, creating an involved art of family relations, exploring the accumulated tragedies of a lifetime, while the other sketches, in bold outlines, the limited relationship between two people whose limited view are in themselves the theme of the play. They make totally different demands on both the actors and the audience, and yet, the end result is surprisingly similar — an admiration of the sheer love and wildly earned, a satisfaction of both the emotions and the intellect. Because, whatever the post-Brechtian playwright might have been taught, it is not absolutely necessary for an audience to be alienated in order to start thinking.

In producing *Long Day's Journey* at the Holm-in-the-Wall, Ray Onsdon turned what could easily have been a hardship into an asset. O'Neill's people could be an embarrassment in a very small theatre. Old James Tyrone has a fiery temper and also indulges in heavy reminiscences and monologues. Mary Tyrone is a drug addict who becomes steadily bitter as the play progresses. Their two sons have their share of posturings and monologues.

Everyone squawks at the top of their voices. Very dignified ground this. And yet — it worked. In the first place, by treating the audience as an audience of the Tyrone's living room, there was a feeling of being present as part of a happening, rather than a sense of detachment and indignity. One was, in fact, rather used to being permitted to witness this intensely personal man at such close quarters.

The casting was extraordinarily successful, made the more striking by the fact that there was no type-casting (often inevitable with the comparatively limited number of roles in an isolated community). Neville Tindle, prominently associated with wily or flamboyant roles (although one does recall a memorable static *Pravda*), is very impressive as the complex James Tyrone. Family tyrant and rugged aging man, amiable Irishman and over-successful business idol, at odds with his sons one minute, drinking companion the next, living past glories and regretting failures.

He attracts compassion but not facile pity, he handles the emotional areas most delicately, he is pompously big blown up and then deflated, self-defence fighting with self-awareness, or clichéd penitentials of love being displaced by genuinely-felt emotion. The length of the play — all three-and-a-half hours of it — allows for the ebb and flow of emotion. Particularly the quiet scenes between father and sons are choreographed with a

was looking for the credible breaking-point after almost unbearable emotional tension.

Margaret Ankertell, whom one has grown to associate with elegant, final and occasionally bawdy ladies, turned Mary Tyrone into a study of velvet and steel in her performance: the play's deliberate device of dropping her developed most intelligently. Early in the piece there is a prevailing air of awkwardness and filumina. Families don't talk or act like that these days at home. This quality of unease at first appears as ambivalence on the part of playwright or producer.

Early gradually does it become clear that the entire family is playing a grim charade, with Mary Tyrone acting the part of the pained conventionalist secure in the bosom of her family, and everyone else in the role of supporting cast. The jarring note of bitterness, half-perceived, gradually gives way to deliberate and blatant deception, guile and ruthless despair as the family gradually acknowledges the unbearable truth so far kept suppressed. As Mary becomes more honest about her addiction, the honey-sweet lady of the first scene gradually turns into a tigress, before switching off into total madness. A star may performance all round.

Donald Hitchcock, whom one had not previously seen in a major role, plays the part of Edmund, the younger son (whom we may take to be closest to the person of the author himself). From his first appearance as the obviously illiterate youngster in his final speech there is a steady discernible growth in the character towards maturity.

It is a perfect example of writer, director and actor achieving as whole an integration that one cannot separate their individual contributions. Although Hitchcock's fresh-faced looks do not fit in with one's ideas of the youthful O'Neill the effect is particularly powerful when, towards the end of the play, he has to plunge from the heights of poetic exaltation (youthful frenzy) to the bitter disenchantment with both brother and mother — no sufficiently one has gone into a tragic man ageing before his time.

The older brother, played by Robert van Marckenburg is an ungrateful part — living in the dark corners of unappetites — slouching in the alternative fate to Edmund's poetic resistance.

John Moody made welcome 'brief' appearances as an Irish maid — funny without being excessively comical.

In both plays the American dream is represented by the theme of land purchase and getting down. In both of them there is the theme of life-partnership and incompatibility being the basis of tragedy.

Long Day's Journey is dancing in the way it transcribes a mass of detail into a dramatic pattern. The Steinbeck play works the opposite way. All the elements of human relationship are simplified and focused into the ill-matched pair of wives, Lennie and George.

George is a cut above the average concrete worker. He has dreams, and over

a practical plan to make them reality. They involve the purchase of a small farm and settling down to be his own boss. He shares his dream with Lennie, his protégé, who is strong in body but has the mind of a retarded child, and represents the closest thing to a family George possesses. George is wise enough to know that in the darkest life of the migrant even that burden is better than no human attachment at all. His grumbling about the situation in life he has crossed through having to consider Lennie, but it is in the frequent grumbling of an indulgent parent.

While in the O'Neill play the richly woven tapestry makes each discovery of the figures in the pattern a surprise, in the Steinbeck play the area is clearly marked for easy penetration. From the start we know that Lennie's uncontrolled strength will lead to disaster. As the play opens he is handling a mouse he killed unthinkingly and is creeping from it in terror that some because he frightened a girl, rapidly unconsciously.

The events in store are predictable — their power is, in fact, dependent on our certainty of the inevitability of the outcome, and our concern is with the way the playwright will get there.

The play is saved from both unconviction and sentimentality by Steinbeck's sharp observation of the language, attitude and lifestyle of his ranch hands. He shows the sophisticated cruelty of hard physical labour, honest and vital to the brother as a backdrop against which they develop their own subculture, with its own faith-lore and racy language.

The figure of Lennie presents a problem, of course. The inherent sentimentality of

the characterisation is mitigated with touches of humour: the eagerly bawdy Lennie, making it hard for the women to turn about the midget he will tend one day as much refreshingly amusing with his child-like demands for food as his beams or threats of going away to live in a cave by himself. His over-super acceptance of George's authority and apparently makes the scene when he strikes out at the taunting Slim's use of the more dramatic.

Bob Fuggette avoids all the danger that could have resulted in a dreadful "cannibal" and plays her less as idiot and more like a bewitched child. Trevor Hux as George shows extraordinary strength in the matter-of-fact playing of George. Of the supporting roles, only the neo-guy Slim, played by Leslie Wright in racy Western style comes close to being a character, and it is clear that they are all primarily meant to function as an enhancement of the central figures.

Leith Taylor has the difficult task of integrating the two people who seem to make up Curley's wife. The playwright presents her as an unmitigated provocateur shut in the first act, and a pathetic, rather silly and lonely young film-struck girl in the second. The scene in which she and Lennie elaborate their dreams of the future, each usually unaware of what the other is saying is played with wonderfully naive honesty, bleeding most skilfully into the tragedy of the unattended murder.

It is a tribute to the direction of Aaron Stelman that the surprisingly theatrical and (George persuades Lennie to "see" their dream-place in the distance while he shows her) is generally moving.



Donald Hitchcock and Leith Taylor in *Long Day's Journey*. Photo Wright

Never mind the why and wherefore

H.M.S. PINAFLORE

MICHAEL MORLEY

H.M.S. Pinaflore by Gilbert and Sullivan. The State Opera of the Festival Theatre, Adelaide S.A., opened 20 September 1977.

Conductor: Myer Friedman. Director: Adrian Mark. Set design: Jim Conway. Costumes: Quentin Hyde. Lighting: Alan Kent. Stage manager: Len Fraser.

Mrs. Coppin, Norma Knight. Deck Doctor: David Brennan. Bill Roberts, Keith Thompson. Major Blacklow, Thomas Edmunds. Captain Corcoran, John Wood. Freephorn, Barry Hargreaves. Sir Joseph Porter, Edward Woodward. Hyde, Angela Dearing. Jack Bolton, Stuart Howe.

In the face of the enormous popular success of State Opera's current production of *H.M.S. Pinaflore* (all out houses so fairly early night) it may appear perverse or, as W.C. Fields would have it, propense to criticism what the public wants and presumably likes. But while the *Pinaflore* does contain individual performances of much merit and related moments when it starts to look like something other than a carbon or Xerox copy of one of the Savoy operas, the evening is on the whole something of a disappointment.

Although *Pinaflore* has never been my personal favourite among Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas — *The Gondoliers* is usually most attractive, *The Mikado* theatrically most effective — it was the first I saw in a professional production.



Interestingly enough (well at least to the audience) two clearly remembered features of that production, some 20 years ago, are complemented and confirmed by this one. I have no recollections whatever of the author Sir Joseph Porter and a very vivid one of a Captain Corcoran, who physically and vocally was impressive and forceful. And the one number which really stood out for its sparkling music and splendid staging — "Never Mind the Why and Wherefore" — retained a remarkably interesting and neatly choreographed performance in this production.

As far the imbalance spread above between Sir Joseph and Captain Corcoran — well nothing could be too like the earlier Captain than John Wood's bouncing, rotund yet acrobatic characterization. The obvious demerit is the fact that he steals the show and makes Edward Woodward's Sir Joseph appear pallid and underplayed.

No doubt Mr Woodward's presence in the cast has served to swell audiences, yet it is not simply because of the (inevitable) comparisons with the superlative Dennis Ollivier that his performance suffers. The first entry — clanking clumsily up the ship's rigging — looks all too convincing whereas surely the vocalized requirement for any performer of these central Gilbertian comic roles is the ability to make a halting still of such clumsiness. (Pity Ollivier's inflexible capabilities in this area.)

But one could accept this lack of physical ability if it were replaced by something analogous in terms of gesture, characterization, vocal skills. And, there is little in Mr Woodward's performance which strikes the right note (no pun intended, as his singing was by no means unconvincing or unattractive). It may be that a little guidance from the director — at such moments as rope climbing — might have helped. For one suspects that not only Mr Woodward but the cast as a whole have not received much assistance in acquiring either a traditional Gilbertian or appropriately an Gilbertian style.

It may seem aggressive to criticize an actor for whose television work I have great admiration but Mr Woodward's handling of the role lacks precision, size and an awareness of how to play off his fellow performers. One can make allowances for the difficulties involved in taking such a role for the first time, but for the viewer it is well rather like watching a trained sprinter stumble around the 400 metres hurdles.

No such reservations about the performances of John Wood and Patsy Hanganaghy. The first was easily the best thing in the production in my experience: a most extraordinary view of the part, yet one that worked splendidly. Looking rather like a British naval equivalent of Hasek's *Good Soldier Schwejk* and full of the same challenge and energy, his Captain Corcoran was witty, light-hearted and vocally sound.

John Wood, (left) Woodward and Keith Thompson in the State Opera's *H.M.S. Pinaflore*. (Photo: Graham Clarke)

He may not have the mainstream quality usually associated with the role but this was more than compensated for by splendid diction and some wonderfully deft physical business. An always reliable performer, John Wood shined in the role what a considerable asset he is (was?) in the Company.

Although there is less scope for individual characterisation in the role of Josephine, Patsy Hannebery made her much more than the faddish scowpler she usually becomes. Her voice seemed a little unfocused in "Serp her lot" with one or two pitch problems in the upper register, but she soon made up for these small blunders. Her 'The House Crops on Apoc' in the second act, was convincingly phrased and sang with fine vocal styling, and she was deliciously pert and appealing in the ensemble.

Thomas Edmonds was in good voice as Ralph and display of rather more presence than usual and David Brennan made a usually serious Dick Doolittle — complete with cut of nose, talk, eye patch, kerp and blackened teeth, while sensibly refraining from the temptation to play the part like some Portsmouth Town footballer of Quasimodo.

Musically, the evening was not an unqualified success. The chorus was well-drilled, the ensemble precise, the vocal phrasing — and for the most part, regularly looking as not, honest and sheer enthusiasm. This may have been attributable in some measure to the phrasing of the songs and the dry witicism but the weaknesses were not only in these areas.

One can admire Myer Friedman's attention to detail and his moulding of the chorus. But this group of singers sounded graced where it should have been rollicking, well-controlled where a touch of rebelliousness was called for and less-aptly rhythmic in ballads can become very boring if they are maintained as uniformly as these were (one noticed the same weakness in Mr Friedman's earlier reading of Wolfe's *Therapeutic Opera*). If both singers and actors had been on a rather lower run, the results may have been less tidy but certainly more improving.

The same lack of vigour was noticeable in Adrian Mack's production. Apart from "Never Mind the Why and Wherefore", most of the set pieces were somewhat static. Admittedly, the production sensibly avoided some of the excessive clowning that is often introduced to make up for other deficiencies. But a little more of the John Wood sense of character and style would have helped the chorus considerably.

It is the frequency of the Savoy operas which in both their strength and their weakness. One other series — as this production appears to — to make the familiar even more so (which means that the music receives more than its share of

attention) or else one tries the more uncertain path.

This way he risks pitfalls but also more rewards in this production than are few and far between. Gilbert's view of the English comic system and his satirising of social behaviour were always marked by a studied avoidance — a quality replaced in this production by its opposite reverence learnt by rote.

A harsh judgement, perhaps, but surely now the copyright question is no longer the problem it was, one might expect a *Produce* which does not set before the audience the same ideal they have been eating for the last three generations. It may well be set out on a different dinner service but the temperature, ingredients and taste have remained constant. And — to pursue the culinary metaphor, — it Gilbert's own words the result was very much "taken with conspiring as cream".

Why did they do it?

CITY SUGAR

PETER WARD

City Sugar by Stephen Pinckhoff. South Australian Theatre Company, Playhouse, Adelaide. Opened 6 October, 1972.

Director, Brian Dehman, design, John Corcoran, Leonard Beale, Gary Allen, Rex, Jim Holt, Big John, David Harthorne, Nicole Duvon, Michael Stroyer, Susan, Laine, Grogan, Jane, Beth Russell.

About the South Australian Theatre Company's production of *City Sugar* enough really has been said by now.

It was incredible mistake. The play simply should not have been produced by a theatre company in search of a reputation for competence.

The cast, indeed, and perhaps so did the director, but the material was something and new. The useful beauty, capacity and capacity of commercial radio, and how its relationship with commercial music is simply to be a somewhat barren voice of the market place manipulating as well as a wholesome entertainment, as a theme worth pursuing, but not in *City Sugar's* simple-minded way.

The play was presented as the South Australian Theatre Company's part of an Adelaide commercial radio station's "Life Festival", an event that in itself was a mixed bag of television and garden popular cultural events. And since marks therefore have to be awarded to the SATC for at least producing a play that tried to advance a critical point of view, but not many.

A large transmitter radio ingeniously turned itself into, first, a radio sound

track, then a supermarket area, and then a teenager's bedroom. In these three areas we watched how a Dick Jockey by the name of Leonard Beale conducted a radio programme assisted by Rex his character and Big John, the station's news reader. Nicole Duvon in the supermarket girl who enters the competition but does not win it, and the director that with her friend Susan Jane was the prize. And that is if I have rarely seen as audience as atrociously bored.

So the question is worth asking, why did the South Australian Theatre Company produce such a dismal confusion?

Was it simply a lapse in taste, or does it indicate a more fundamental and structural disability?

Since Mr Colin George took over as Artistic Director early this year, Adelaide theatre audiences and SATC subscribers have been treated to *School for Scandal*, *All My Sons*, *The Cherry Orchard*, two short new plays, one by Ron Blair and the other by Michael Cove, *Just Cracklin* in *Just Rock*, *Amor Got Your Gun*, and *City Sugar*.

Yet to name any *Marbeth* and John O'Donoghue's *A Matter and Holy Ghost*, while on the one hand and yet in its own time-light in the company's theatre-education activity under the direction of Roger Chapman.

On paper it's not a bad line-up of potentially significant events. But it can hardly be called gripping. Indeed, the most significant and important theatre event in Adelaide so far this year was *Never Mind the Why and Wherefore*, which really stirred the audience and I hope the SATC demonstrates how to produce with inventiveness, style and relevance.

Colin George's director of *School for Scandal* was excellent. The production worked, the play had great charm and dash. There was a sense of theatrical maturity and intelligence about the whole production. The design by Rodney Ford was excellent. But then followed a blunderous *Cherry Orchard*, a dull and heavy-handed *All My Sons*, *Amor Got Your Gun* which was a tell-tale in both areas of the term, and now *City Sugar*. Only *Just Rock* and *Ron Blair* and Michael Cove's pieces are remembered as having a note about of creative tension about them.

Amor Got Your Gun can only be justified on the grounds that it brought into the playhouse theatre a great many people who would otherwise never have set foot in the place, which is something like an excuse. But not a good one. The fact that the Company decided to play it tonight is the most, control, and I believe, damning criticism to make about the production. And it stands as a symbol of the 1972 season up to *City Sugar* at least — that is to say, a season and a mismanaged company that is vigorously starving it knows not where, because too often it is simply running on the spot.



LOOK ME UP IN BOON BOON
VIA GUMBY GUMBY, WAGGA WAGGA,
COBBIE COBBIE.

Terence's mother would be proud

MISS LITCHFIELD'S RIVERINA FOLLIES

MARGUERITE WELLS

After Litchfield's Riverina Follies, devised by the Company Riverina Trucking Company at Riverina C&E, Wagga. Opened 22 September, 1997

With Kim Hardwick, Sharon Hills, James Laffie, Ben Moffat, Terry O'Connell, Toby Proctor, Miss Rose Litchfield, Julie Whogger, Roy Rafferty's Rhythmic Boys, Jeff Brown, (bells/mouth harp), Alan Catling, (keyboards), Mylen O'Meara, (guitar/mouthb), Gary Peterson, (guitar)

Miss Rose Litchfield is a lady of a gentility almost divine. You can see it in the way she treats a neatly pinned curl farther into place or puts a diamond ear ring. Not precious, dear me, no, just a little remembrance that the exquisite pleasure of highlight perfection that she presented five minutes ago has not been marred in the passing of time.

As *divorcee* of the *Riverina Follies*, which has played from Adelaide to Zanzibar and made the history of the Riverina furcous world wide, she has a personal in-

terest, no doubt, in keeping the stage clean (though with a clearly depicted social conscience that must make her and her troupe leaders of the Adelaide (thinking set), and glistering with family fun.

So, while directing the performance compassionately from the audience and filling in with a north for a spot when the lighting fails, she still finds time to keep up with world events through the pages of the *Woman's Weekly*, and to assure that young Terence O'Connell has written his weekly letter to his mother who worries about him so.

Young Terence's mother would be proud of him, though if she could see him trawling the boards, a seasoned trouper, on the 'Wagga leg of the *Adelaide* — Wagga — Zanzibar tour.

One of his songs, *Home made music* (which he wrote with young Kenneth Moffat, member of the six *Follies* troupe), would have brought tears of pride to her eyes, as it brought tears of laughter to the audience's. It was all good clean fun for the soldiers and their girls at the swinging centre of Riverina anglade, the Coconut Grove (We were in 1944 at the time). Home made covers was the floor show, a pleasant tune, sung with firm assurance, and words that were straight to the heart — or the stomach — it was a recipe for march-making and chocolate angels!

The inventiveness of the Riverina Trucking Company, in putting together the brilliant and beautiful show in four weeks, and in writing the twenty-one songs

that studded it, is simply staggering. The wealth of material that they found about them, in the history, real or imaginary, of the Riverina, warms the cockles of a satirist's heart. Though the music was generally in the American idiom, it was about Australians, by Australians. For Australians and without a trace of cynicism.

They seemed to feel no need to prove the ingenuity of Australian traditions, however short, as a worthy subject for theatre. They assumed it and went from there. And there was nothing tentative about the way they went, as their audience testimony of the intrepid John Short shows.

'Captain Short had a sister. So he named the towns all wrong. He named Wagga 'Wagga Wagga'. He named Gungah 'Gungah Gungah'. And there were not the only names. That Captain Short mistook. He called Gungah 'Gungah Gungah'. He called Boon 'Boon Boon'.

No doubt that song meant slightly more to the members of the audience who assured us at intervals that his address was 'Boon Boon, via Gungah Gungah, Wagga Wagga', but as a four part round, it beat kookaburras on old gum trees by a long way. It had the Trucking Company theatre quavering with the balance enthusiasm that the audience put into it, and made such a roaring finale for Act I that it is inevitably upstaged Act II.

If one had to find a general fault with Trucking Company productions, and one has to look hard to find it, it would be that the atmosphere does not always match the rhythm and pace of the theatrical conception.

A faultless line here, a glaze on the face, a cast member whose performance is, to use an O'Connell phrase, 'possibly less than excellent'. It can be explained away by the limited population resources of a big country town, when you have cast all the very good, you may sometimes have to start on the quite good, but the quality of the artistic core of the Trucking Company needs no explaining away.

In *The People Show Number One* and now *After Litchfield's Riverina Follies*, they have created a genre that is a perfect frame for their budding multiplicity of talents, without demanding a dominating Broadway or a Caruso to do it justice. They claim to be nothing more than the Greatest Show on Earth on its eternal provincial tour, yet they give more than one could hope for from any provincial touring company. It is the perfect compromise.



A strikingly well-made play

GOING HOME

BORELLIS

Going Home by Alan de Graaf. Manned Theatre. Uptown's Sydney. Opened 10 July 1997. Director, Richard Wherrett, designer, Ian Robinson. Joe Chris Hayward, Zoe, Catherine Wilks. Mike, Gary Day, Molly, Nancy Hayes, Tom, James Elliott.

Although in some ways like *Down Under*, a like-minded play by Anne Brooksbank and me about expatriate Australians dragging their feet once more back home to the "vibrant color side of the world" (where, we may be certain, their yellowing vision of a dream, well-lit place in which to be a true artist will slide them once again) Alan de Graaf's play, *Going Home*, also in three lengthy acts, is in some ways a much better one — again in its theme, richer in its characterization and more satisfying in its delineation of the understanding female who watches, time after time, her half-headed, overbearing husband blowing it.

The husband, Jim, (Chris Hayward) a somewhat novel-seeker with strict ideas of what true art should be, is headily leaving up his modestly promising career as a painting tutor in a provincial university in snowbound Canada. He would prefer, on the whole, to be fired so he can go back to Australia where things, by definition, will be easier. Zoe, his wife, (Catherine Wilks) has seen it all before — her feminist education, his irrational hope, his unfocused, hopeless belief that he is art progressing and all his colleagues feel of phony — and she begins to contemplate leaving him.

Her opportunity arrives in the form of her husband's old friend Mike Dabbs (Gary Day), an excellent, name-dropping, wind-surfing, jet-setting international art connoisseur whose numerous chaps, girlfriends and bad taste have got him important exhibitions in Europe and New York. He has come with Molly (Nancy Hayes), an overweight, metropolitan Australian consort of self-doubt and big, fearful smiles through whose bed he scored his big chance in New York.

Molly has come back to Canada in the half-hope of shoring up her barren marriage to Jim's best Tom (James Elliott) after five months of desolate promiscuity round the pick-up bars of New York. Tom, a gruff, stoic, faded painter

from the working classes of Yorkshire, a man mid-aged and worn and miserably content with his minor place in the universe, wants Molly back as a matter of territorial pride, but for his acquaintance demands from her such humiliating terms (like immediate sexual congress, now, upstairs in a stranger's house) that she rejects him again, but only for a time. Though full of varied path, Zoe decides, too late to run away with Mike, when Mike, as it so went, has broadly changed his mind. So the painful status quo reasserts itself and slowly and grudgingly, with no real hope of greater faith, the wanderers come home. They will, at least, appreciate it now.

It's a strikingly well-made play, with a focus, economy and structural poise that put me in mind of Simon Gray. The wit is simple and mellow and though intermittently apologetic never plays a character false for the sake of a laugh. In all its aspects except perhaps that of vulgar string I had a superior to *A Handful of Friends*, many of whose preoccupations it shares. In particular is its delineation of the choices open to an artist — exile, faulty optimism, painful, momentary self-delusion and near pedagogical withdrawal from the only race on the world worth running — all shown in a mood of considerable multidirectional compassion. And its delineation of the choices open to a woman is equally. You can be either, the actress is to say, a flabby bachelorette at home or a pliant, wandering show, but there is no middle way. At least not by then it is.

The production, by Richard Wherrett, was sharply and tender and made of a second act that could have been merely a small masterpiece of drunken contrivance, and the set, by Ian Robinson, bulky, wooden and extraordinary, a pleasure to live in. From the sharp excellent performances I would, in one mood, pick James Elliott's love-drunken academic Yorkshireman for the gravity and pain of his cracked despair and Nancy Hayes's flabby emotional climber for the smoothness with which she did round his bygone whinging (and in another mood Gary Day for the relish and make of his moon-touched world-conquering snarl and Catherine Wilks for her deep, often-eyed remorse. Chris Hayward, though one of my favorite actors, and in this case a beauty and penance rough-blower of laughs, was lost on his Cockney accent and could never quite wriggle off his unbelittled. Clearly a classic evening of sorts, as least as good as *Down Under* (I hardly nearly acknowledge) and one well worth a revisit.

This is not a heavy play and could be entertaining

FANSHEN

JOHN McCALLUM

Fanshen by David Hare. Manned Theatre. Downtown, Sydney. NSW. Opened 27 August 1997.

Director, Richard Wherrett, designer, James Elliott costumes, Yvonne Pender. Alan Becker, Tim Burns, Margaret Cameron, Mike Callaghan, John Jay, Suzanne Rayburn, George Skerrett, Bill Summers, Stephen Thomas.

Wouldn't it be nice if more plays were brain-clearing, uplifting, informative or mind-expanding experiences? If you could go to the theatre knowing that here the leading ideas of the time were to be corrected, and that you were about to learn something about people in the world and be imaginatively involved in something outside your experience? If we, as audiences, were prepared actively and with open minds to respond to the situation of such a play and aware that through our participation we leave the theatre wiser and enriched?

Fanshen is potentially such a play. It deals with a human problem and a political process of which we have no experience in the West. The villagers of Long Bow, several hours of miles northwest of Peking, depend for their very survival on how quickly and efficiently they can come to terms with the political change which is reorganizing their lives.

It is not so much a political play as a play about politics itself — the relationship between the leaders and the led and the human effects of radical political change.

In the aftermath of the Japanese occupation, and in the middle of the Civil War between the Kuomintang and the Communists, the villagers have to organize for themselves the "fanshen", or revolutionary upheaval, which will take them out of their feudal dependence on their landlords and turn them into good communists, working for themselves and controlling the distribution of resources in their own area.

The play studies the political plan they are given to do this and the problems they face as they discover that politics is complex.

The directives that are given the villagers by the Communist Party, and

which challenge all their former ideas of how to go about things, request for there a major effort of rebuilding. A similar effort, at least of imaginative involvement, is required of a company that performs the play, and of an audience that hopes to get something out of it.

David Hare claims in a note quoted in the programme, that the West, with its current political problems (of distance between the people and their bureaucracy) has a lot to learn from the study of the political situations set forth in the play. If this is so then director and audience need to work hard to invest themselves without prejudice in its totally different world.

The shape of the play helps. In a Brechtian fashion it presents issues in set pieces, each illustrating a particular development and each leading to a complex picture of the change in the village. Good Citizens Communists, the characters stop what they are doing for self-criticism and re-evaluation.

The audience, who have been going along with the characters' actions, continuously find themselves subconsciously questioning grave ideological and procedural errors, which the play duly corrects. In a sense it is a teaching-play.

Why, then, is this production so unsatisfactory? Is it that we are so frightened by the constraints of our own culture and the values of our society that we are incapable of thinking ourselves into the situation in Long Bow?

There is evidence of a great deal of work on the part of actors, in trying to understand the villagers whose experience of the world is so different.

But there still seems to be a great deal of Western thinking going on on stage. The confrontations between the villagers, the cadre organising them and the Work Team from the provincial centre are presented too often in terms of rigid, closed classes of personality — classes which no doubt existed but which muddy the argument and confuse the political direction of the play.

There is an obvious problem with such a piece, of simply boring your audience without involving them at all, but I do not believe that the solution is to inject a bit of character-interest and thereby hope to sugar the pill.

A play of political ideas need not be a boring pill at all. With commitment in the playing, and clear, single-minded presentation, such a subject might stand on its own and interest audiences of whatever political persuasion.

A serious problem is that the whole mood of the play tends toward the catastrophic, at least as played in the Mairiad. There are good guys, except they keep turning into bad guys who send more good guys to fight them. An interest in who is going to win is out of place in such a study of process. The outcome is in a way irrelevant, and indeed, is not decided by the play. Although it ends with a splendid theatrical evocation of the ideal

communist state, the process is still going on in Long Bow.

It may seem that I am complaining about precisely those things that ought to make an otherwise heavy play entertaining. However this is not a heavy play, and could be entertaining. This production, lacking a clear driving purpose, does not bring it.

In the programme Richard Wherrett writes of how the rehearsal involved Asking Basic Questions and Self-Criticism, two aspects of the political plan in Long Bow in the play. Useful though this undoubtedly is, it is a pity it didn't also produce the commitment and personal concern that might have given this otherwise excellent production the intellectual power it needs.



The star is Sondheim

SIDE BY SIDE BY SONDHEIM

WILLIAM SHOUBRIDGE

Side by Side by Sondheim by Stephen Sondheim. Theatre Royal, Sydney NOW. Opening 23 September 1977. Director, Ray Cook. With J.R. Perryman, Bartholomew John, Geraldine Murray, John Lees, Patrick, Dale Kingston, Michael Elwood.

Well, it took long enough to get here, but the skilled patchwork evening of the best songs of Stephen Sondheim has arrived at Sydney at last and will travel on to Melbourne and Adelaide later.

I must admit a powerful fascination and delight in Sondheim's lyrics. Over five years ago I gathered my close friends (lily with the cast album [poorly named] of Sondheim's *Follies*, pointing out to them the exquisite apocryphal cleverness of his lyrics, and so closely to the natural rhythms and inflections of the speaking voice.

Anyone who has ever heard "Farewell My Love", "Losing My Mind" or "Anyone Can Whistle" cannot deny the astounding strength and piercing truthfulness

Yet, although Sondheim was words as the melody, music is his master. He makes a thorough grounding in strict musical composition, and while he himself will say he has no great gift as a melodist, he manages to put music to work, makes it speak with a parallel and compatible voice to whatever his lyrics are doing and saying.

Those who, like me, were fortunate enough to attend Sondheim's master class on lyric writing at the Music Theatre Forum earlier this year will remember the content and swift way in which he underlined what he thought a song should be and how it should be constructed. How songs shouldn't echo what the script has already said, how they should fit exact times, places, moods and characters. How there are two sorts of song, those that propel the storyline forward and those that elucidate an individual commentary on the action, delineating a personality, if you will.

There is ample evidence of his craft in *Side by Side* (and secondary strength) in *Sale by Sale* by Sondheim.

The trouble is that the show, being a pot-pourri, tips the songs from their context, suggests them to stand on their own ability as self contained treatises, and some of them cannot stand up to the scrutiny.

Sondheim also mentioned at the Forum the value of collective effort, a successful show is built up everyone connected with it starting from the beginning and working on everyone connected with it starting from the beginning and working in close co-operation. He mentioned the song "A Walked in the Country" as a case in point. That song was written a week before the show opened, it needed the composer/lyricist to see the characters and the set (Born Aronson's reinforcement of walking lyrics glided) before he could reveal that marvellous set piece of a song that illustrated whole layers of troubled relationships, passions, intrigues and personal fears. The result was a breathtaking triumph of deft wit, concise psychology and stark imagery.

Side by Side by Sondheim wisely selects such examples and focuses its attention on the great ones from his shows, the big, deeply personal comedies from *Follies*, *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Company*, and *Piggy* as well as a few show-stoppers from the above-mentioned and others such as *Cygnets*, *The Mad Show*, and *Pacific Overtures*.

Others have said elsewhere and I'm afraid as true, that the present show suffers from the lack of an orchestra so that we cannot enjoy the songs coached in Jonathan Tunick's smart, questioning orchestrations that add so much in the way of texture, tone and emotional colour.

But Sondheim sings reasonably well with just piano accompaniment in better than so Sondheim sings at all and one can only be thankful that the pro-

death have the courage to bring to Australia the work of a man whom most audiences have never heard of and who have never experienced his work at first hand (*44 Little Night Music* was mounted by J.C. Williamson's a few years back, but that's another story).

Only one song of Sondheim's has imprinted on the general consciousness here in Australia and that of course is "Send in the Clowns" from *Night Music*. A haunting melody now listed to being snatched by almost every aspiring show chanteuse in the country.

So what's the big drawcard here in Australia? Well, there's Jill Perryman, a former and much loved starlet of the Williamson of yore, there's the above song and, for Sydney, there's... John Law.

Law's heavy handed commentary peppered with stale jokes and floundering attempts at topical satire threatens at times to hinder the evening entirely. Neil Sherrin, the narrator for the London cast, is a natural unaffiliated wit, Law is not, let's leave it at that. Noel Farrow is taking over the narration for the matinee moderately, but that still isn't much of an improvement.

In the chat of the singers I hear you mentioning in conversation Jill Perryman is a good singer, and a considerable comedienne, but here and there she goes in for some unobjectionable mis-ging, enough to make Jerry Lewis look like a master of understatement. In fact a degree of ragged Laugan-claughness seems to creep into the show a little too often for my taste. Things like that are a world away from what Sondheim's songs are about.

Sondheim is crude and elegant, his characters are soluble, mercurial and edge (or at least they have been to date, God knows what they'll be in musicals to come). The Australian cast, too jittery with first night nerves, perhaps, didn't seem to have that persona that gives that made the songs spring to life and remain believable.

Both Perryman and her former center Geraldine Morrow are good at projecting the physical, acting side of a song, but in voice they were stilted, the tone colour underlining character (or rather attitude changes within a song) did not come to the surface.

There were reactions of course, mainly towards the end of the evening when the audience and the stage had warmed up somewhat. Perryman's rendition of "Fin Side Here" from *Falsetto* took up from the story to land better danger to radiant triumph (albeit with a catch in the throat) and had the audience on its feet. Yet even here it could not completely eradicate the memory of hearing Carol Kaye sing the same song.

Geraldine Morrow had an unwavering tendency to follow and shrink at moments of stress, and a alert towards flimsiness when she was trying to be husky. Yet here again, the lady singing the slowed-down heart-wrenching version of "Broadway Baby" was quite superb.

One person who worked as hard and was largely ignored by the daily press was the talk terror of the evening, BarrieStewart John Grogan. Grogan's support consisted only with claudoning the words and music of Sondheim, he was, as far as I was concerned the solid, secure base for the whole show.

His only drawback was a lack of definition, a certain loss of differentiation that made him seem oddly monochromatic in both voice and character, one example being his rendition of the title song from the ill-fated *Stepwreath* *How Blue*. This song is a well contained layering of personal shortcomings, a confession, yet one that implies help. John didn't catch those subtle gradations when the lyrics and the song felt flat accordingly.

It was that, as I have said, to the best of the songs being torn from their context, of the academic libretto of a *Proctor/Sondheim* show being unpacked. It was also due to the director.

The stage was filled with business, little of it to my point. The over lap and growth of nearly every song went for broke. If only Sondheim could have made it over as was hoped, he could have coached the team through the rapids, guided them into a deeper awareness of each situation and character, he might have even been able to make the narrator and his narration more supportive than it was or wasn't.

And yet, and yet, I wouldn't have existed if it were for the world and I want you happy and delighted despite my misgivings. It was not an evening of total unalloyed joy as you can see, but perhaps if one looks beyond the process of the current cast towards the product of Sondheim's expressive ability, one will be constantly delighted, awed, and appreciative of one of the most innovative, audacious and experimental talents in the theatre today.

'Jack has a passion and a purpose which is refreshing'

JACK

JOHN McCALLUM

Jack by Jon McNeil. Newrad Theatre, Newtown, Sydney. Opens 11 September 1977.

Director, Ken Harker, designer, Larry Eastwood, music composed by Robert Murphy.

Tom, John Clayton Jack, Martin Harris-Wood, Malcolm Keith, doctor, Barbara Bennis.

Jon McNeil has spent more than half his adult life in prison, been bodied by warden and felt the debilitation and effects of prison life. Jack is his first play written outside, and it is better and passionate about the

destructiveness of the prison system.

In it we are led progressively down through a series of prison cells to the hell of the maximum security prison at Grafton, N.S.W. (A ripple through the audience when Grafton was first mentioned on the night I was there testified either to the pathos the place has had recently, or to McNeil's ability to set up his hell.)

Unfortunately for Jack in the play his virgin in Oscar Wilde and his Marlene is played by a girl filled with wares water — not enough to bring him through to salvation. He never came from the cell at Grafton.

Jack falls into two separate halves. The first half is a straight-forward and naturalistic series of scenes between Jack and his audience Tom. It leads, backwashed from prison to the real world, as Jack explains to Tom that without someone to love, you are less human, and without the gentle unifying influence of women, men are incomplete — animals.

The act is slow, sometimes awkward and almost embarrassingly personal. Jack is not satisfied with the companionship of his mate Tom, and makes a voracious friend — the plastic bag — who represents his black-haired woman outside and to whom, or to which, he talks.

The act closes as Tom, who has killed the plastic bag to show Jack that it's not real, gets frightened of his violent reaction and calls a warden.

The second act is a complete break from all that Jack is now in the Observation Section at Long Bay Gaol and the real world is left far behind. The impersonal, functional murder of the first half becomes a lightning sabbat, directly addressing the audience, beating up Jack and talking with the Doctor (he with his hat, she with her drag) to force Jack further on his road to Grafton.

With the sort of used reverence with which Hochberg brings *Aschewitz* on stage in the final act of *The Representative* the audience of the first half is dropped.

When human attention is not allowed the realistic dramatic unscripted of character is inevitable. From the entrance of the warden at the beginning this act looks forward to Jack's inevitable destruction.

The shape structure of this play, it has been claimed, interfaces with conventional notions of dramatic unity. At interval the expectation is that the play will continue in the same vein to explore the relationship between Jack and Tom.

Tom's total disappearance in the second half, however, and his replacement by the warden and the doctor, forcefully highlights Jack's loneliness. It is primarily by going against the expectations of the audience for the second half that Jack achieves his pathos power.

The play, at least in this production, seems of anything too tired in pushing that progression to its conclusion. Ken Harker appears to have backed away from the second half, so that some of its extremes seem rather merely as noise and an

betwixt, passionate outbursts suitable for the soapbox rather than the theatre.

Also the character of the female doctor, who is half sympathetic and half apologetic, confuses the earlier argument about the women needing each other to be complete human. In her warmer alliance with the weaker (she makes Jack's otherwise merely odd relationship with his phobic big brother politically regarded), by taking away any justification within the play for his hopes of women.

Without daring to suggest that Jim McNeil rewrite his play I suggest the effect would be clearer if that is suggested element were removed. An all male cast would intensify the mood of the whole play.

This play shows more clearly than any number of pieces of investigative journalism what it's like to live in prison and feel your personality being taken away. I was going to write that the rather clumsy attempt to confront the audience with its own responsibility was unnecessary, and certainly some members felt alienated and confused by being abused.

I'm now not so sure.

There is a feeling of indulgence in the reminder of trendy shortcomings towards playwrights who are black, or female, or ex-prisoners. I don't know how Jim McNeil feels about having his suffering and his personal commitment explored by them, but I am sympathetic with his trying to ensure that some political good will come out of it.

Certainly the cast do not lack sympathy and commitment. John Clayton and Martin Harris, old hands at this sort of thing, act with great sensitivity. Malcolm Keith captures the naive energy of the second half, and an accident at one of the previous suggests his potential of a sadistic murder or if anything too lightning. I have said that I find the doctor out of place, but that is hardly Barbara Daines' fault.

Jack has a passion and a purpose which is refreshing after some other things as an Sydney at the moment, and I don't much care if Jim McNeil never polishes up his style. I just hope theatres don't try to polish it up for him. I suggest wait from Newmod, for next year perhaps, the production of a play by a while.

Tom Oliver was really very good as the hero

AWAY MATCH

KEA CRAMPHORN

Away Match by Peter Yeltham and Martin Wain. Morris Jones Theatre, Kilburn, NW6. Opened 1 September 1977. Director, Adrian Daines, designer, Boon Mookes, stage manager, Frances Taylor. Tony Papp, Tom Oliver, Graig Papp, Sue Walker, Lucy Gordon, Lynn Rainbow, Michael Duncan, Vincent Bull.

Away Match is a mildly diverting, non-revolutionary-intended piece whose principal themes, as reflected in the title, are marital infidelity viewed as an indoor sport and an attempt to give up smoking. The central character has been dominated by his wife throughout twelve years of marriage (it is generally agreed among the characters that she is a 'sport betch') and during the action of the play he manages to give up smoking and liberties himself from her by making love to the wife of his best friend.

Despite the fact that his own wife now realises that she loves and needs him, the central character maintains his independence at the end and it looks as if they're going to part. Actually, at certain, (no certain full but one full for cost), it turns out that they're not going to part but that she is going to let her wear the pants. (She has, I think, worn pants throughout the play.)

One's interest is held by the question of whether the central character will stay being a gruffly incompetent mess and become a successful new man. And, as I say, he does. A marginal question is whether the wife of the best friend will accept the 'arrangement' she has with her 'swinging' husband and throw in her lot with our hero. She doesn't. So, finally, the integrity of the two marriages is maintained — our hero's being regenerated and his best friend's continuing as its comfortably incompetent state.

I'm at a bit of a loss for critics in this sort of play. I guess it could be said to be successful if one accepts the characters as being in some way 'real' or well observed, or if one can somehow identify with their problems. If this is the case I must admit that I don't know anyone like Tony, Evan, Lucy and Michael.

That, of course, is not to say that there may not be just such couples in West-end if dated all over the Isle of Skye (where the play is set) and elsewhere. On

the other hand, although I couldn't honestly say I found much to identify with in their situation, I did develop a sort of theoretical interest in them and a certain curiosity as to what sort of fate their authors would contrive for them.

The play is largely, in form, a comedy and neither interest might be the degree of success that the playwright aims in making the characters spring to life in vivid comic dialogue and situations — one thinks of the plays of Simon Gray and Denis Sullivan as examples of this ability. Well, I may have seen a rather flat performance — a Tuesday night with a small audience — but I found the dialogue rather tepid and lifeless, a sort of bland white smog of jokes, and the situations rather less than vivid.

It has taken me a while to remember any examples of the comedy but here are two as a usual gag the hero's incompetence is illustrated by an attempt to clamp the handle on a glowing bomb on to an antique table by wedging it between the top of a ladder and the underside of a seat suspended from the ceiling. The respect of the idea, the inevitability of an failure, seemed to me to over-arch the character's credibility at that point, without significant gain in the way of a remotely funny situation.

And, as an example of the dialogue comedy, the aforementioned bomb which has been built inside the cottage by our hero and which is too large to be got outside with any ease, is treated as a small symbol and metaphor about 'taking it out', 'going it a go', 'seeing how it will stand up' abroad. And the play ends with the hero standing up as if while his wife waits for him to be ready to launch it in his own good time.

The comedy, in short, gave me the impression of having been added to the character material as a conventional adjunct designed to render it palatable and familiar.

I thought Tom Oliver was really very good as the hero — the bawdy case-maker, the self-conscious incompetence and defensive weakness looking out a little pathetic in the costume man and shading nicely into the euphem of new-found self-confidence. Sue Walker played his wife and didn't seem to be very comfortable in the parts (certainly I didn't think they suited her), and it's a pretty unattractive character.

Lynn Rainbow played the best friend's wife to good purpose, making one quite hope she would leave her awful husband. Vincent Bull played her awful husband in a very credible, What kind sort of way. Writing about the characters and the performance as if they were somehow admirable makes me aware that I am looking at them in rather the way people look at favourites in a soap opera.

All in all, it's the sort of play which might once have drawn its audience off the way into town to see it presented by Wellman — Martin St sensibly brings it much closer to home.



Tom Oliver

Photo: Peter Holbrook



Maggie Kirkpatrick (left) smiling, Margaret Ford (center) and Robert Deering (right) in a scene from *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*. Photo: Robert McFarlane

Are wit, style and pace too much to ask for?

THE TIME IS NOT YET RIPE

DOROTHY HEWITT

The Time Is Not Yet Ripe by Louis Esson. Old Tote Theatre Company. Drama Theatre Sydney NSW. Opened 7 September 1977. Director, Peter Collingwood; designer, Anne Fraser.

Denis Helen Morse, Sydney Barrett, Neil Fitzpatrick, Miss Pyburn, Joan Henry, Joe Joseph, Quentin, Sir Hutton, Sir Henry Pittsley, Peter Collingwood, John A. Hill, Al Thomas, Lady Pittsley, Margaret Ford, Brian Sturges, Katie Swearing, Ianie, Richmond Phillips, Dr. A. Roger Carroll, Harry Hopkins, Kevin Liddle, Peter Joseph, Rod Williams, Arthur Day, Richard Collier, Nigel Hughes, James Fox, a Sir, Miss Tom Farley, a young youth, Greg Rappaport, a working woman, Maggie Kirkpatrick, an old man, Mrs. Mable.

Louis Esson's *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* at the Opera House, a large about politics in Edwardian Melbourne, should fair and sparkle in early elegant and popular.

How come then that the Old Tote production lay as heavily as the imagination in next pudding?

A pity! It would have been delightful to praise the early Esson play, because the first deserves praise, and it has been neglected for far too long.

It is true that the women did infinitely better than most of the men. Helen Morse, as the witty and seducing social butterfly, Denis Quentin, who stands for Parliament on a "Festival of Light" platform, looked enchanting, was dressed to kill, and seemed to know what style was about.

But Neil Fitzpatrick as Esson's scientific mathematician, Sydney Barrett, a socialist Rhodes scholar and wealthy patroniser, just back from Oxford, seemed com-

dashing about the stage in an irritating Henry Fitzpatrick can do marvellous things, but this was not one of them.

Portia actress, Margaret Ford, OBE, a brilliant lady, did an eighteenth century comedy of manners as Lady Pittsley, which was pretty close to the mark, James Fox, an actress to watch, was as incisive Violet Falkner BA, LLB, a blackmailing "nice woman" with shades of Major Barbara, Joan Henry, buried far too long in the suburban slush of Cressy Wrenne, did a workmanlike Miss Perkins of the Anti-Social League, and one of my favourite Sydney actors, Robin Waring has an amazing instinct that told him he was playing a mix of Wilde and Shaw.

Dr Philip Parram in his introduction to the Century National Theatre production of *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* in 1973, describes the play as Wilde made and Shaw outside. In the elegant Prime Minister's drawing room it is J.K. Wilde, in the socialist club, the stout married Miss Quentin's conversation rooms and the street corner political rally, it is all pure Shaw.

The political rally was the most successful scene at the Opera House due partly to its own theatrical aspects, (stage car on stage, heckling crowd, Edwardian street scene) but also to the delightful mix and the finely balanced "mixed".

What was lacking was that sense of an overall style and pace in the direction, so that every actor would fit into the quite intricate plan of the piece, every actor would know where he or she was, and what role they were playing. There was a sense that everyone was making it up as they went along, sometimes losing the moment, but more often than not playing just off-beat.

The pace changed gear alarmingly, slowing down to a dead march, speeding up to a mad procession. It was as if the actors themselves, aware that something was wrong, were trying to push the pace along.

It should need no pushing. Apart from anything else it is still chillingly topical. The Liberal PM (for Australian Liberal, as always, read Tory) makes speeches extraordinarily like Mr Fraser on the bus dodging questions, although Esson's PM is more ironic, the American businessman, John K. Hill, who wants to Americanise Australia by eating beefsteak and making Chinese coffee from our typical pine forests, because there is an unbroken market and the Liberals filling out themselves to sell him the country are all still with us.

Denis Quentin's "We are all keenly interested in politics. It's the latest thing" is a prefiguring of Patsy White's trendy Mag in *Big Toys*, going off to her wireless rally for the Liberal Party.

One would imagine that a play which was, in Dr Parram's words, "quite clearly written for the well-heeled folk of Toorak village" and using an already "established range of formal and stylistic conventions", would still be relevant for the well-heeled folk of the city of Sydney, particularly as Opera House audiences, and that the elegant and expensive professionalists which the play always needed, would be possible on an Old Tote subsidy.

There seemed to be no true understanding in the production of the larri character and philosophy. It's true that this is a more complex. Esson is not proceeding us with a "real" left-wing politician, but with a true, Shavian, anarcho-socialist. An intellectual who demands that everyone live their lives to the fullest stretch of their imaginations, a sub-thinker, a disturber of the peace, an over-reacher who is ahead of all thinking and human and talking, and therefore can never make a politician.

Like all Utopians who love the masses in theory, he can't stand them in practice, but he is not just a political lampoon. He is as real as the men Joan Henry, but then nobody in Australia seems to understand Joan Henry's theatrical ether.

This is the third production of *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*. The first time was by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre in 1952, in the presence of the Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, but although the play was initially acclaimed and "highly successful" it did not move into the commercial theatre.

The second production was at the Union Theatre, Melbourne in 1971, with Esson's grand-daughter Katie Esson, playing Denis. The production was mounted by the Tenby College and Janet Clarke Hall Dramatic Club.

Wit, style, and pace, some glossiness of historical scene, surely these are not too much to ask from one of the two major professional companies in Australia, but we seldom get them. Is it a failure of nerve, a failure of theatrical intelligence, or just the diffuseness of an over-indulged mouthful, not necessary at all?

As Denis says, with her admirable candour, in the crowd cheers on the other side of the PM's plushy drawing room, "The band is out of tune."



Robert Ramsey as Henry Lawson in the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *The Bush and Other Stories*. Photo: David Parker

Henry Lawson is alive and well in Melbourne — twice

HENRY LAWSON

JOHN LARKIN

While The Billy Bobs, based on Henry Lawson's writings, by Leonard Taile. Grant Street Theatre, South Melbourne. Opened 3 September 1977.

Director, Leonard Taile; design, Ian McPherson; lighting, Tony Weiss; Lawson, Leonard Taile.

The Bush and Other Stories, devised by Robin Ramsey from the writings of Henry Lawson, compiled and adapted by Robin Ramsey and Rodney Fisher. Melbourne Theatre Company at Russell Street Theatre, Melbourne. Opened 29 September 1977. Director, Rodney Fisher; design, Tony Tripp; lighting, Jamie Lewis; Lawson, Robin Ramsey.

This is the year of Henry Lawson again — at last, at least, anyway, in Melbourne, where we have been blessed by two almost simultaneous productions of his work.

First is *While The Billy Bobs*, which he has staged at the Grant Street Theatre in South Melbourne. He was only a few weeks before a season at the Russell Street Theatre for the Melbourne Theatre Company by Robin Ramsey of *The Bush and Other Stories*.

But there has been little obvious sense of competition between the two productions, for all the apparent coincidence of their timing.

If anything, they have probably complemented each other, first by all of a sudden drawing all the attention to one of the first (and last) great Australian autobiographers — for Lawson was a poet, poet-boss — and second because each operates in quite different dimensions, so that attending both was necessary to know as much as we can about him.

Now was there any of that awful business of each production claiming to have the real Lawson, and, indeed, doing that might have been a problem because if one thing is

clear from his confused life, it is that he was many people.

The only other reason to hold the two shows up side by side is to say the Ramsey angle was much more relaxed, not in the sense of being gentle for Lawson was never that, but in the way of being a better distillation of the legend, building out more depth and breadth of both information about his work and the Lawson interior.

Both quite perfect, safe and bold, quite destructively, bear different types of resemblance to Lawson.

The Taile programme consists of a night in some hall at the turn of the century in which Lawson contemplates his reluctance in his eternal search for money — the man was incredibly poor — by smoking and bits and pieces of being himself.

Taile's magnificence was real and felt in amongst the potted palms as a guide to the many moods of the man, as well as his great sense of looking for the land around him, his being such an involved witness when much of Australia's attention was still being diverted away from itself.

Lawson would suffer from this trend. While he longed to be taken seriously intellectually, his country was still busy being engrossed by the needs of Europe.

Lawson became popular for the wrong reasons, for the expensive staff he turned out for his beer money. This, along with his alcoholic problems, his hearing problems, his money problems, his women problems and his personality problems, frustrated him.

Toin was much of his time to spend as the piano, but in between, there are glimpses of Lawson himself looking Toin, but an edge of anxiety about the evening, which makes us wonder whether Lawson has a secret, wants to hang to perform that like a dog for his dinner, is halfway to getting drunk, again, or not just plain shy, or a mix of those, all at once.

Added by such devices as staring very hard at individual members of the audience, and, on occasion, making as if changes with them, Toin has our attention all the way through, even when he drifts away the end of the night by having Lawson break down when talking about love, and have to be helped off stage by an usherette. It was a mistake, but not bad enough to take away the taste of the belly as he howls of his empty table.

On the other hand, the Ramsey night is an experience more for the mind. It might have been, then, more to Lawson's liking taking time and space to look for the later known outer limits of his work and inner limits of himself.

Ramsey spent much time on the Mitchell Library in Sydney researching the Lawson writings, then he drafted his script, which he and Rodney Fisher then compiled and adapted together.

It should not be assumed that because Ramsey gets inside Lawson his rights will be some sort of means depressive criticism in which empathy has become a pre-field.

We are made much aware of Lawson's awful isolation, both real and imagined, from his country and its people, his eternal search for someone to sit his head, his finding it not in the city, not in the bush nor overseas, and not even within himself.

Yes, apart from his always being up against it — or perhaps, partly because of it — Lawson, through Ramsey, a most sensitive medium and imaginative enough to make that cope with Lawson's moods, never forgets his sense of fun, or man.

Indeed, much of the evening is funny, a drink, down on the inside-but-a-pen-they-eyes, back at life back a Reginald, and all the way back to the city of Sydney and the overseas, according to him, offspring of London.

Robert Ramsey's great talent for being many characters meets the needs of all the people in the Lawson status and drink improves on them, so we are constantly aware of a stage humming and bubbling and boiling with the intensity of the Lawson perceptions.

Most of all, though, we enter Lawson's loneliness, his trying to come to terms with being himself. In both these aspects, he was a fair and fine reflection of Australia itself. Through Ramsey, this has been reborn.



My Fair Lady without the songs

PYGMALION

RAYMOND STANLEY

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw
Melbourne Theatre Company presentation at
Athenaeum Theatre Melbourne, Victoria
Opened 13 September 1977. Director, Ben
Lubin, designer, Hugh Coleman
Cass: Kenneth-Hill Sally Cahill Mrs
Peggy Llewellyn-Jones Jacqueline Gifford
Lyndell Shaw Gary Brown Ellen Boulton
Sandy Gore, Colonel Pickens Mr. James Chalmers,
Henry Higgins Frederick Pascher, Cecil
Hodgson, Roy Robbins Mr. Pearce, Beverly
Phillips Alfred Doobin Edward Higgins, John
Higgins, Mary Ward Mrs. Higgins, Helen
Pearce, Carmel, Karyn, Robert Howard A.
Brenda Ropely, Beverly Phillips, Frances Ray
Robbins, Judy-Jay Whiting, Sally Cahill,
Helen, Maria, Clara. Other individuals in
Scene 1: Peter Carmel Robert Howard Maria
Clara.

George Bernard Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* in 1912, especially for actress Mrs Patrick Campbell who, after many tribulations, played the role of Ellen Doobin at the age of 49 in the first English production in 1914, and was still performing the role in other productions up until 1930. Only Shaw's refusal prevented her reviving the play later. When the film was made in 1938 Mrs Campbell was approached to play Mrs Higgins, but declined, which, for history's sake, wrote a great pity.

Pygmalion was the first play by Shaw to really make money, and has continued to do so ever since. It is much more of a "poker" than any of his others. Considerably or not, its plot is very similar to an incident in Sinclair's novel *Persepolis* Fickie, which Shaw admitted having read as a youth.

Apart from the well publicised rehearsal rows between Mrs Pat, her leading man anti-romantic 60-year-old Sir Herbert Beerliohg Toot, and Shaw who directed the public, in 1914 was almost before hand by press reports that Mrs Pat, during the course of the play, would speak a forbidden word which could not possibly be printed.

It is not so much the years, however, and the persuasive age, which have taken the wind, as to speak, out of *Pygmalion*. It is that 1938 material based on the play, *My Fair Lady*. To see *Pygmalion* today makes one realise what a brilliant play *Laurel* and

Lower did, and one expects the performers — or Higgins at least — to have into being whatever some of the actress's lead-up dialogue is spoken.

And what about that word itself — bloody? That first audience greeted it with uncontrollable laughter, caused by somebody present in 75 seconds! And a crowd much comment later amongst the clergy and other sugar-bodies. Lower and Lower updated it to "move yer bloody'st arm", which was somewhat daring in the '30s. Only a sensitive four-letter word would suffice today — and even then the impact would hardly equal 1914's "bloody".

Ray Lubin, directing the play for the Melbourne Theatre Company, has used much of Shaw's printed script for the 1978 screen version, which is quite a good idea. It brings in new characters and scenes and fills out the action, made possible by use of a revolve stage. Has this version been used before for the stage, I wonder? Certainly the recording of the play which the Redgroves made incorporates it.

It is not too much "Topsy" business is introduced in the proceedings, Shaw will almost always play well and succeed at that level, and with *Pygmalion* the rules are pretty well set-proof. When J.C.W. presented *My Fair Lady* John McEldown used to mean anyone could play *Ellen*, and proved it again and again with unknown 16-year olds from the chorus substituting for aging leading ladies.

So quite naturally the MTC do a competent job most of the time. Sandy Gore and Frederick Pascher are fine and experienced performers, and notably fill out the parts of Ellen and Higgins. The Pickering of James Chalmers though is far too youthful, and indeed seems younger than Higgins, when it should be the reverse. As always with both the straight and musical versions though, it is really Doobin (this time Edward Higgins) who walks off with the evening's honour.

I felt personally that, for a company of the MTC's stature, some of the rough past playing could have been better accomplished. Mrs Pearce was fairly vocal and Mrs Higgins appeared to be playing — on first night at least — in a different style from the rest of the cast. Her performance was straight out of a major musical play.

Maybe actress Mary Ward was right in the approach, and the others wrong in approaching the play as a classic. For *Pygmalion* is a Shaw's most commercial play. So, why should the MTC be staging it when one of the company's declared aim is "to provide for the production, representation and performance of theatrical entertainments which are not generally offered to the public by commercial management". There are so many other Shaw plays Australia — and Melbourne — still has never seen.

Fairly traditional costume and good set design from Hugh Coleman. For one of the sets had been so constructed that a gap was left at one side of the stage — or was that the touch of the revolve?

Q



Melinda Mayguy and Robert Beckman.

Where the hell is Camberley?

THE BRASS HAT

RICHARD POTTERINGHAM

The Brass Hat by Thomas Mouchamp
Queensland Theatre Company S.O.I.O.
Theatre, Brisbane QM Opposite 24 August
1977

Director, Robin Laverie, designer, James
Edgewood, stage manager, David Graham
lighting designer, Ric Mackay-Scottley
L1 Col Guy Hahne, Alex Edwards, Clive
Harwood, Barbara, Brian George, Bradley,
Brenda, B. Fremant, Frances John Brown, Douglas
Hedge, Maura, Gerald, Charles Anderson,
Glen, Ron Haddock.

The QTC, having offered us four English
plays out of five at the SGO this year
(*Amadeus* was the lone Aussie) is now

ending in the end of the year with four
more — Mouchamp's *Brass Hat*, Cissy's
Deceptive Reparat, Ayckbourn's
Confessions, and a country last of the
dubious *Why Not Stay for Breakfast?*

How a state company can justify those
last two (for *The Sound of Music* at *Annie
Get Your Gun*) bums me, and though the
present strong acting company will
probably ensure good productions of all
four, I'm also beginning to grow weary of
the English, their tedious preoccupations
with their dachshund self-image, and the
irritating assumption that the behavior of
people on a small island with very different
historical and cultural traditions from ours
is a satisfactory image of how we think and
behave.

Robin Laverie's director's note in the
programme for *The Brass Hat* offered the
usual tedious rubbish about how the play's
background — the barking up of a
massacre of a pro-communist village by

the British Army in Malaya — is
"incidental" to its theme of social violence.

If an American wrote "*The Home Life
of Lancelotti Williams Colley*", would the My
Lar massacre really be incidental to that
play? And if Colley had driven one of his
murdering soldiers to suicide in an attempt
to back up the massacre, would we really
describe that as "a human tragedy" (the
words the author uses to describe the
simpler plot of *The Brass Hat*)?

And could our imaginary American
author really get through two hours of
dialogue without even querying whether
the Americans should have been in South
East Asia at all, in *The Brass Hat* author
manages to do for the British?

There's a world of difference, to use
another analogy, between showing the
terrible problems of the Australian
Commandant, who has been told to kill
100,000 Jews and only has gas for 50,000,
and showing that the same goes

commandant is really a bastard at heart who's even capable of cold-bloodedly killing his assistant-murderer *The Moon Man*, in which, is a lamp apology for imperialistic arrogance and mass murder, and whatever its self-pricking (one couldn't say lazzetage) value for the British, it has no place as an Australian stage.

On a more trivial level the Moon on the Scares — "The Living Room of the Moon's married quarters in the Camberley area ... in the present time" — is a classic example of the stannic survival as our staid compatriots of the idea that England is the centre of the world.

Where the hell is Camberley? (I now guess from an atlas that it's the area around Sandhurst Military Academy south-west of London.) In the present time? Events in Malaysia have undergone many major changes since the past world war two events which he behind the play.

Someone should run an elementary course on recent Australian history for the benefit of our theatre companies and play selectors. The Chifley government supported (and heavily subsidised) the nationalistic movements in Indonesia and South East Asia, and even during the Malaysia/Indonesia confrontation when English and Australian troops were both stationed in Malaysia, the conservative Menzies Government through Sir Geoffrey Blainey made it clear to the British that English and Australian interests in South East Asia were very different.

The assumption of Australians are not those which he behind *The Moon Man*, and those who would like our theatre to be little corners of a foreign field that is forever England need to be confronted with a few hard facts.

It's a pity I suppose to have to be so critical of a good production well acted. Ron Woodcock's presence gave an extra boost to the play, and Douglas Hodge (who showed as in *St Joan* that he was capable of vocal tones other than the iron dinnity which is his stock in trade) displayed an emotional range and maturity which made this his best performance to date, but there's not much to admire the shift on a routine apple.

We've got to stop restraining up the blind alleyways of the minor English playwrights.

Shaw and Shakespeare are one thing, Harold Brighams, Anthony Shaffer, Thomas Mutchamp and Simon Gray are quite another and we've got to keep looking for shared productions of universal human relevance till it stops looking.

Mr Lowrey is in his state again "Is the emotional violence of social corruption, or auto-murderous inter-personal relationships, any less than that of machine guns, killer bombs, or the flow of blood?"

Perhaps not, from the point of view of actors who spend their social fire breathing show show dogs, but from almost any other, yes, Mr Lowrey, it is.

The production was saved by the play

THE SEASON AT SANSAPARILLA

RICHARD FOTHERINGHAM

The Season at Sansaparilla by Patrick White. Twelfth Night Theatre, Brisbane, Qld. Opened 21 September 1977. Director, Jean Whalley, designer, Jennifer Cavellier, stage manager, Paul Callings. Cast: Jean Whalley (Pip), Michael Gale/Jane Hamilton, Gail Pagon, Kate Wilson, Douglas, Sally Wilson, Harry Knott, Les Evans, Nola Boyle, Rosaline Mac Smith, Clive Pagon, David Chudleigh, Merv Knott, Norma Knott, Judy Pagon, Les Burns, Roy Child, Peter Kowals, Ron Suddards, Geoffrey Williams, John Stern, Bill Eden, Ernie Boyle, Mark Orlinson, Mr Erbege, Big Cameron, Rowley Mason, Tim Hughes, in consultation with, Richard Christensen. The production was, Eddie Constantine.

I put my professional teeth as a performance stage manager, and the old director (whose theatrical acumen stretched back into the nineteenth century London stage) installed in me the main thrust is the art of making the cheap look expensive. Ah happy days! The things I could do with a yard of taffeta. And the programme! Mature number two. You can always rub money on the programme.

So my first impression of the production of Patrick White's *The Season at Sansaparilla* at Twelfth Night Theatre was of such matters ignored. The programme was a reworked short, and the set looked as if the total budget was nothing, which is probably so. The actors were a broad mix at 1855-1965, with about six or seven strong lengths and head heights that line actress Kate Wilson was dressed as social climbing Edna Evange instead of the gramer's daughter who married beneath her, and only a well sustained performance saved her from the cheap aged jeans.

The sets looked as if they'd been thrown in the street and mistaken for people hitched by the Sansaparilla dog pack, and the lighting — particularly the down and dark atmosphere work — was basic craft.

The extensive use of music (a perfect cheap and looks good device) was shockingly executed, with gaps opening different ways in different places and doors frequently not opened at all. All in all you could have easily mistaken that production for one by a company that wasn't.

professional, was making no attempt to do things well, and wasn't interested in making money.

Which was a pity, for there were some good acting performances, and the play saved all. Eight years after regular professional theatre came to Brisbane, we finally got a production of a play by arguably our greatest playwright, and *The Season at Sansaparilla* is arguably his greatest play. It should have been the glowering peak of our theatrical year. It is also the last production by Jean Whalley, an artistic director of Twelfth Night Theatre after at least twenty years of consistent achievement there. We should have been packed in the seats and cheering.

Instead there was perhaps a third of a house thinly scattered. The lady on my left had never been to a play before, but she'd come because she'd met the people in the next unit at Harbourside at the Peter Allen concert in the Gardens on Monday night, and since they were Twelfth Night subscribers and evidently had similar tastes, she'd tagged along to that as well. She got very restless during the second half.

Since Twelfth Night has consciously set out to create a popular and profitable musical comedy house style, among their artistic similarities with Patrick White done on the cheap (except for 14 actor salaries) is bound to be extremely disappointing and frustratingly disastrous.

And yet on top of everything for me at least it was great just to see the play. So much recent Australian theatre consists of heavy scripts propped up by fine actors and imaginative directors, and here was a miserly script, with some strong central acting performances. The musical rhythm of the dialogue was short phrases, and the pungent dialogue often satirised into the unforgettable.

This production is correctly set in 1961, the year it was penned, and it's exciting to see that time has aged but not decayed. Australia seems to have entered its age of Victorian prudery just as the British were escaping from it, and we've only just followed them into some semblance of decency.

In 1961 the wide band on the female breast was automatically stressed from films, and was abound of on stage. Patrick White's blunt, direct, and retentive periods of sexuality and of human responses to it — the barren philosophising Nola Boyle, the prismatic and anguished Gail Pagon, the con-prigmat Merv Knott, the discomfort of Pip — must have hit the audience of mature years ago smack between their Gail Pagon eyes. We may be more blunt, but we haven't escaped from such discussions of behaviour, and what's enlightening merely has altered and grown. Gail Pagon learnt to make music out of almost nothing, White has taught us that we can make music from out of a reluctant watchdog. It was simply a pity that Twelfth Night served us this chef's speciality on cracked and dry dumplings.

Playscript:

JACK



Jim McNeil

JACK



The play is set inside various NSW public schools at Parramatta, the "Gles" section at Long Bay & finally at the maximum security jail at Griffith

ACT ONE

Two men in a cell, each with his own thoughts: the wall radio playing a love song. Tom gets up and switches it off. Jack looks at him.

Tom: Didn't want that, did you?

Jack: No. Thought you did.

Tom: No. All that love shit.

Jack: None of it here.

Tom: They don't want us to get any closer.

Jack: I don't wanna get it, I wanna be it out before I go fuckin' mad!

Tom: (He's high at this. laughs.)

Jack: Not that... affection, y'know?

Tom: (Tom's round eyebrows.) Well, y'know to give some fuckin' affection to somebody? To touch, nuzzle, someone's hair, smile at 'em, let something go from me to them... y'know?

Tom:

Tom: No. I hate the name. The fat, warm and cream look. Only affection I'd give 'em is to with a flame-thrower.

Jack: Well that's how we started to feel, too? And I don't wanna!

Tom: Can't avoid it.

Jack: I wanna kill it not avoid it.

Tom: There's a fire handout every in this joint... you'll have some kills to do.

Jack: I didn't mean that.

Tom: Y'know what you mean.

Jack: No... no I's just not.

Tom: Jack is downcast.

Tom: Ah, look Jack, I know through that shit... weird things women think they are things and people and me with 'em, but give it a few years 'n y'know it's all shit, y'can't go roundin' or nuffin' just because you feel like it, 'cause it's made you

it's not made them, they'd punch y'job out if y' tried any o' that.

Jack: Oh, yeah I know... but.

Tom: Look, Jack... we've made the look — no affection for nuff.

Jack: Well I'll make me own!

Tom: (grins.) Whatever y'reckon, mate... but you don't go touchin' them!

Jack: Haha. Well I'll find something.

Tom: Sure, why not? Go ahead mate.

Jack: You wouldn't mind?

Tom: What?

Jack: If I did?

Tom: Go f'yer life.

Tom:

Jack: Cards... +

Tom: mate, they pick up cards and settle in the table to play. Tom looks at the play.

Jack: And y'wouldn't mind.

Tom: Where man?

Jack: There.

Mr. Garbino: *Tom shrugs him down.*

Light: *down*

Light: up

The Same Setting:

The red door creaking behind Tom as Jack, then as alone nearby, Tom lighting a butt.

Tom: *Albino!* Well, that's another day up there, ain't it?

Jack: Yeah, it's good to get back in the Peter Jesus Christ, I couldn't hardly stand it in the yard — bunches of stone faced morons, they ain't no.

Tom: Don't let it get to ya.

Jack: Ah! ah, Tom? have y'ever really had a good look at me in that yard? Ever stopped well and really looked and thought about it?

Tom: Wouldn't wanna.

Jack: I mean have you ever taken in what's going on? Christ! I just stood there against the wall today, watching, wait! see all walkin' along their own invisible little toes, not one of 'em ever touches another one. Was a lot of numbered islands (Boston is nowhere on a map is that? — shit!) All with their eyes on the ground, all with slanted looks on their faces, trying (think laugh or something), convincing each other what had made this all was — hell!

Tom: Yes, I know, you don't have to tell me, I know.

Jack: I know — y' walk into that yard and it's dark, dark, inside those heads who was that past that mean that? — who blew out the lights in that poor house? — like that, so though all their light is blown at night, in the yard's dark just because they're not — shit! Why can't we look at each other — why not smile at each other now'n again? Why're we all frightened even if break against each other in a fuckin' yard?

Tom:

Tom: (careless) Who is?

Jack: Oh not you — don't smile ya.

Tom: I walk in the yard.

Jack: But I don't mean you!

Tom: Well who?

Jack: All of 'em! — no, not all of 'em but enough of 'em — oh, y'know, most I mean enough of 'em to make it so dark y' can hardly see.

Tom: Well light a fuckin' candle. And when I'm not frightened (though any bastard they'd just better not touch me — is the name is the game).

Tom:

Jack: But it has to be — it has to be lighter be that.

Tom: Fuckin' what?

Jack: Ah, well, y'know — light.

Tom: (laugh) — human company.

Tom:

Tom: Know what y'would like? A naked fuckin' prick. Just do a bit everyone else get y'well a good, full y' prick till the lights go on again — that stop (takes) garbage.

Tom:

Tom: Give that thing in the history some word every week and she'll fuck y' brains

out — do y' good?

Tom:

Jack: Don't want no brains sucked out.

Tom: Well what do y' want?

Tom:

Jack: A woman (Tom starts to chuckle).

Tom: There's gotta be something.

Tom:

Tom: Ohhh. I see — oh well why don't y'be like Murphy? Boy bananas — a shove (sit up your ass!) Or like Kennedy, stick it in y'head (raise — cause sure y'don't touch none — or like McQueen, always over the highest tryin' a budge a nice cucumber — (groans) why don't y' try some a that?

Jack: I heard it was apples with Murphy.

Tom: Nah bananas.

Jack: Uh — lot of a difference.

Tom: Fruit's fruit.

Jack: Oh, yeah — but how if you?

Tom: How do y' think?

Jack: Oh, yeah — lots.

Tom:

Jack: Wonder if we'll ever get them companyed with.

Tom: Duh.

Tom:

Tom: Long as they're not compulsory.

Jack: Better a banana.

Tom: Oh I dunno.

JACK



Jack: No — ah, well — I dunno.

Tom: (chuck in their own laughter).

Jack: Yeah, Tom — I decided already, about what I'm gonna do.

Tom: Oh y'have —? What?

Jack: I mean about my woman — it's gonna be this.

Mr. Garbino's an empty plastic bag.

Tom: What's the fuckin' joke?

Jack: Y'heard last night you wanted?

Tom: Mind what? What a y'father's about?

Jack: This. It's what I want.

Tom: For what?

Jack: I've told ya — for my woman.

Tom: That's his —?

Jack: Yeah (Tom starts laughing) No, look, wait a sec — (Jack pulls out a tie bag of his water from beneath under the table) — see, now you just hang on to the bag a minute — it's hot though — oh, right now just pour it in your — right I've got poured hot water into the bag. We pour down the bag and wait.

Jack pulls out a towel forever for Tom to hold.

— right, now you just wait 'er round the top of 'er — yeah, so?

Jack reaches happily with bag raised. Tom stands staring anxiously.

Tom: What's with that?

Jack: See — (He puts the bag in his bed against pillow, tucking it with blanket).

There, there the is, all ready for when I come home. C'mon, Tom.

Tom: (careless) You like darkness?

Jack: Why not? We always have a game, don't we?

Tom:

Tom: Yeah — let's play then.

Light: down as they begin to play.

Light: up

Tom is shirt smoking a stick, Jack is shirt smoking his woman against his face. He sighs out under a cryin' Tom.

Jack: How's the look, mate?

Tom: Ah it's not bad.

Jack: What about?

Tom: I dunno. I'm not so — my mind's all somewhere else.

Jack: Ah, Yeah! I thought so. Been watching you — haven't I saved a page for a long time.

Tom: No.

Jack: I do it a bit. The same thing.

Tom (laughing) Uh-huh.

Jack: Yeah — ah, well, it needs a higher seat books anymore now. No need. She's all I need, this one here (cuddling).

Tom (shy) Good on yer.

Jack: (sighing happily) Yeah (Tom's) See, Tom, you said it. A man needs a woman. That's all they all need out there in the yard. Woman. Otherwise they're not really men. They're only half-men: there's two parts to being human, and one part is a woman. A man on his own is only half the things. In that he's a fucking animal — not the woman following his nature, makes him human.

Tom: Mmmmm — I've made sure (he turns a page).

Jack: Ah — (Oh that's good. You ought to read *The Animals*, by a bloke named Lawrence, you read it?)

Tom: Nah.

Jack: Toodle! Great book. That's the part in it where he tells what a woman really is to a man.

Tom: Oh, yeah.

Jack: Yeah. You know — it's just beautiful, he says — I can't remember exactly what he says, but it's beautiful!

Tom: I believe you.

Jack: He calls her 'The Angel of the Dawn', y'know, with and (sighing) good for the soul of a man — bringing goodness and charity to sort of make up for his rough, hard nature — y'know?

Tom: I haven't thought about it. I'll have to get the book.

Jack: Yeah — oh, yeah. A man and a woman see, they make one human being together. See, steps in being animals — that's why they're all fucking animals out in the yard.

Tom: I heard you the first time.

Jack: And he says that when a man and a woman fuck — it's like two rivers of blood meeting.

Tom: Fuckin' what?

Jack: Two rivers of blood — that's not in *The Animals*.

Tom: What?

Jack: It's in something else.

Tom: Yeah — right.

Jack: Something else all the time.
Tom: That's better, Jack.
Jack: Oh! Lawrence's I'm not sure because I want that what I just said about men and women making me human being. He said that about the Angel in the Door. I know that... but maybe I might've work on the other thing out there. I'm not sure.

Tom: I am. I'm due for some sleep. He says he took a little nap himself on the bed, putting the blanket over his head.
Jack: Goodnight, Tom.
He walks across at four o'clock. He slowly down on his bed. His face melting the bag on his back. His two hands moving the bag down his stomach. Lightly down. The bed moving slowly back to the darkness. Jack that's what he said. Tom's two words of blood.

Tom: Morning.
The bed is ringing. Tom is spread dressing Jack is in bed.
Tom: You'd better move.
Jack: I'm staying in.
Tom: Back.
Jack: Not the best, no.
Tom: What's that?
Jack: It's a headache.
Tom: Want me to put you down for the —

Jack: No rejection. It's not a day in bed water. I'm.
Tom: Ah, well they'll look you in Jack (sighs). I know.
Tom: You want your portfolio?
Jack: But what's that water.
Tom: Ah, my love.

He puts up the bag, puts it on the table. Tom's outside at the door. The door is slowly unlatched.
Tom: I'll tell you in a second.
He puts on the door, pushing it open. Jack is there, looking slightly. He lifts the blanket in his hand, looking under, putting it down.

Tom's outside. Tom's food barrels (singing) over your bagging the water of some, rolling. Come on, all out! etc.
Jack is smiling at the bag in the bed. He puts the blanket, looking at the bag under the blanket.
Jack: You just say there. You said to come out. But I say here, when all day, you and me... you like that? Hehehe. I thought, you might like a day with just the two of us. We've got a lot to talk about. And in front of Tom. Good all Tom, all on his own, just looking at the water of a cigarette light or music and music on the road? Ahhh! That's good. A girl like you and a cigarette too. I could write a song called that. What do you reckon, hey? I'll wonder (sighs) fully. — now, well I shouldn't say all on his own. He's still got me. (Sighs) he has. — now he has the bed moving, nothing the blanket. Hehe he doesn't know the blanket but water — sorry, forgot myself. So need to be alone. Yes, or with just Tom. — now, get to know. — now, he's better than the

child in the yard — sorry, done it again. — now, have a try and watch that, won't it? Hehehe. — now, what I saw, and a the husband do on a very yesterday. — now, at the time, some what people come and stand in the cold just to visit one of these women. — now, well yesterday a woman came with a little girl and a baby in a basket, just to visit the thing behind of him and try to make him happy and let him know she loves him.

Tom's.
Oh, yeah. (sighs) yesterday I thought I'd tell you, make you sad, it made me sad. The husband, he just married up in that way, I know, and there's his lovely self, pretty with water in there with the baby and the little girl — she was about, oh, about four years old, and she had a drawing on paper in her hand. She said she'd done for him — the big husband of a thing — and it was a picture, really, of a you know how the wind shape across the front there? Well it does. Anyway he went straight up to the wife — to his wife and kids — and never even said hello. He just wanted showing her, straight away. He even told her water for her to say it, and he started weeping and tears at the woman, and she was crying. He was so sad, but he wouldn't let her, and this little girl started the drawing she'd done.



for the man and the kept woman it and hold it up and says "Daddy, see my drawing, see my drawing I did for you — but the never even saw her much less heard her, all he wanted to do was be a father, just Jack. Jack looks at cigarette, cigarette on the wall, his hand holding the two smoke and crying.

Jack: And you know what? That day kept showing his wife and the baby in the picture started crying, and the girl kept saying daddy-see my drawing, and oh, Jesus Christ, love the father, word love it, out of her hand and it went up and up with her looks. After a — and over the wall. I know over the wall and he never even knew it. The day just a little girl and a woman over the wall. I let her throw it. Now after a Tom suddenly comes in the door with the boy, water, balancing a plate of a dish on top of it. He puts it on the table, over to Jack, who makes.

Jack: Thanks, in a — hey, it's a Tom: Hehe! — I told the same, just, he says he'll tell you in the office. Tom proceeds to stand in the doorway at the door is closed from outside. He has also picked up a couple of tea from outside the door, after putting the hot water on table. You he offers a cup to Jack.

Tom: Want a tea?
Jack: Ah — oh, yeah, will you show a bit of sugar in it.
Tom: I have.
Tom: I have the tea and give it to Jack who gets up and gets it. Tom goes to his portfolio.
Jack: Well, I'd better write me make up. Jack puts up his head. I let her throw it and says to water the portrait.
Tom: I should go tonight for some portfolio.

Jack: Well you go for me!
Tom: Oh, yes.
Jack: I have water from bag and the milk from milk, up the hot water and sounds making — this pouring in Jack, then she bag on completely.
Then the water (sighs) procedure. Tom goes back to his work. Jack puts the bag back in the bed, against the pillow.

Jack: I'd better show.
He goes for the milk, taking a drink and then goes to the cupboard. He starts looking for his cup and saucer.
Tom: Excuse why you're bothered to do that. No one's gonna see you today.
Jack: Does you're bother, Tom. — over what a woman who likes him is nervous, all over her face.
Tom: Hehehe! Tom's up, Jack's Jack: Here what up?

Tom: That's better!
Jack: Not better! Women are soft, I've told you. Their skin is soft, eyes is hard and rough and we've got a thick about that and the something about it, his heart, a share and love, soft, because we don't expect our roughness on there but that, other way round.

Tom's.
Jack keeps showing Tom starts looking Tom: Jack's.
Jack: Hehehe.
Tom: You are joking, aren't you?
Jack: It is what it is, I am.

Tom: Jesus (sighs).
Jack: Hehehe! I am. You don't have to like it. You can always make.
Tom: What? Jack, are dead? — see you Jack's. — but-daddy! Me move out to let a Jack's! — oh, Jesus!
Jack: Try to come down in language, will you. I'll be there for you. Tom will always support me. I'm going to. — now, now I'm making a mistake about.

Tom: Hehehe! Oh — Jack's, are/dad! Jack: She can't hear you. Tom: You can't see all the thing (sighs) you like. She won't hear you. The thing is, Tom, you can hear yourself. If you want to know yourself in an animal like those can — those were in the yard, then that's your business. You're responsible to yourself. That's well known. You know I read a lot, Tom, I learn things — I have learned a lot of things. I haven't talked about to you, because. (Sighs).
Tom: Because what?

Jack: It doesn't matter.
Jack: I have to work on her completely.
Tom: Yeah, it matters. Because what?
Jack: Because. — because you wouldn't understand.

Tom: It's not... because what? Why not?
 Jack: Well... because you haven't got a woman. I am, no good/no influence to make you do that... you're an animal like the rest... sorry.
 Tom: There! — Jack goes on coughing his line.
 Tom: Have you lost a whisker in the past?
 Jack: (coughing) What? See what I mean.
 Tom: Right. And unhappily on the table.

Light goes and up again to Jack alone in the cell. The door flings. Noise outside of across railing outside — members the roll-call the bell ringing the feet from going on.

Jack is in bed alone in his cell alone. He is holding the bag to his neck under the sheet, looking to it.

Jack: I love you... y'know that? (He reaches the bag, smothering it) Just you're me (He smother the bag) Like old times (He shakes his head slowly) Remember? Never thought word Jesus. Sorry... but y'know what I mean? (He looks up) Well for you y'know, I would be... well I was good, really good... right off no hand like an animal. Not now, I'm all right now, thanks to you... because of thing, you are... well... at the door... you know what you've done for me (He smother the bag again, speaking gratefully) I was lucked — sorry — but that's what I was — I won't say it again... but that's what I was... lucked. Told you it is not really so when I say it, not when I say it like that... it's just the only way to say it lucked. I was lucked, love, really lucked. Not a bit of love, no? I mean more you? Not at all me to anyone else. I was stuffed full of feelings that had nowhere to go... you know what I mean? You understand that? (He regards the bag questionably, nodding smiling) 'Course y'ko. I know y'ko. I know why I liked y' then. Wouldn't be here, if you never knew all that? 'Course y'wouldn't... me. I am sometimes, but you know him it is living with all these ones, y'got rather y' said. When being without you all this time... wonderful about things, how things are going with you... y'know, and the worst part 'bout about the way you do things... it's funny that the clock never stopped for me, I mean the day they put me in here, but not for you out there... so when I ever saw y' again you'd be different, older, and you wouldn't have that hair... remember what I used to tell you? Midnight, after y' had Jesus. You had the blackest hair in the fashion world (He looks up, staring down.) You won't laugh. I tell you something... (Power)

I wrote a poem. It's about your hair, and some words you for a long time hard to explain, but it was just that I thought you'd — that you or hair wouldn't be as black by the time I saw you again except it wouldn't change as long as I never did see it, as long as I only had to see you always like you were... Midnight anyway, got it if you like it.
 He puts out of bed, comes again in a bed. He

stands with paper on hand, writes.
 Jack: (Hears) Tom will stand it's silver through the dark folk of your hair, (trapping in line) I hope the years we could not share. But for me and love to look it, and I will see you there... laughing, then and loving me with Midnight in Your Hair (Power) He stands off, unconsciously.
 I mean, oh, I'm no good in that it, but that's how I've been feeling. Anyway, I wrote it for you, hope you like it a little bit.
 He puts hand into bed, smother the bag, reading.
 There is a cutting of keys at the door. Jack jumps up from the bed, goes towards the door, stands apprehensively.
 The sound of the door, a light being thrown the road, of finger door opening.
 A Voice: Get y' self dressed, folks, you're wanted at the hospital in fifteen minutes.
 Jack: I'm all right.
 Voice: Get dressed!
 The door slams shut. Blacked Jack stands unhappily, rapidly observed.
 Jack: That doctor Tom... couldn't have told me properly. I'm sorry, love, but it was a take long... (He starts to dress) He had to tell me I'm not done... he look at a flash.
 He keeps dressing. Light goes.



Light goes.
 The Cell. Night.
 Tom stands holding the candle Jack has on his head while going right. Tom is wearing his blacking.
 Tom: Come a play, mate.
 Jack: Fucker, mate.
 Tom: Oh.
 Jack: Today.
 Tom: Yeah.
 Jack: Yeah.
 Tom: What, yer mean good...
 Jack: Aye... well, educational.
 Tom: That's about the gist of what I mean... far-dinkins.
 Power.
 Tom: Ah. Well, we playin'?
 Jack: Yeah... y'know, a mate, other think of what that means — far-dinkins. It means how true, a loyal, come of a fuckin' about with mates or that... just got thought down the middle, and so that or from two-faced with a mate... far-dinkins.
 Jack: 'Course, it's 'having a go' at Tom because he is fully aware that only Tom could have caused the error to make him to the hospital that morning.
 Power.
 Tom: Aye, well we all know that. (He shuffles the cards, comes more) we gonna

play now?
 Jack: Sure, it's on the table, Tom.
 Tom: Oh.
 Jack: The same who sent with me is against me.
 Tom: Yeah... will you read that stuff?
 Jack: Stuff.
 Tom: Well, y'know I mean.
 Jack: Yeah, I read that stuff.
 Tom: I didn't mean... well Jack, I — Jack: Y'know that? Y'know that.
 Tom: Yeah, but no offence.
 Jack: That's what he said.
 Tom: Oh.
 Jack: The doctor, the quick... psych... when he got me this morning... I mean, what's all this stuff about a bag?
 Jack: Matter hard at Tom... who can't handle it.
 Tom: I'm not with it.
 Jack: Aye, ya? Oh, Oh, well, that's right, I forgot I haven't told ya... I had to know the psycho that morning? They came and got me, made me get dressed and go to the hospital... thought it was just these best... sorry because I was stupid, in fact, me, it was to see the psycho.
 Power: Tom smother Jack's eyes.
 Tom: Uh... funny.
 Jack: It's a, eh? The psycho makes a note, wonder what, far. Don't y'know?
 Tom: Yeah, he tell ya.
 Jack: Told me earlier? Just asked me things... asked me what I liked, all right, any worries, and I want to talk to somebody y'know.
 Tom: Ah... funny.
 Jack: Funny all right.
 Tom: Yeah.
 Jack: Funny how they picked on me out of all the guys to ask how I was... I was almost as if someone told 'em I was up to something... some dog who was probably all me or something... some sort of an informant or something.
 Tom: Oh it wouldn't be that.
 Jack: Oh yeah it must, a bet... I mean how else does a man get called to the psych? Someone told 'em some bullshit about me, sure.
 Tom: Oh.
 Jack: (coughing) y'know that's what I said to the psycho. I said — lookin' him right in the eye, I was... y'know, where to tell — I said look, doctor, I'm not normal, normal, but I know what's been killin' y' things in your year time... kind of... really, but can't help myself from thinking that someone's wrong with everyone else. (He goes on Tom) and I went on like that at 'em, y'know and I know who'd told 'em that he was really worried about the bike, that I wouldn't say who he was or any like, they'd know someone as you like, I was... the... (coughing).
 Tom: Ah. Oh, well, that's good. Gonna have a game now?
 Jack: Wonder who the bastard is.
 Tom: Oh, mightn't be anybody I never find out anyway. Not worth worryin' about I don't think... what'll we play?
 Tom: All with the cards, looking at Jack

BETWEEN THE LINES

It is no accident that Henry Lawson and his work should be going through a rebirth of interest. His life and work hold significance for the present generation of Australians.

He was, then, a champion of youth and the true workers of the country. He was a nationalist without any of the jingoism that sometimes occurs.

He fought his own poverty, lack of education and partial deafness and wrote himself to the top of the literary pole. He is one of the greats of Australian Literature. His determination is an inspiration to the youth of today.

I hate the wrongs I read about.

I hate the wrongs I see.

Lawson's writings will inspire those who are apathetic about the problems facing this nation of ours because he pleads for all Australians rather than any particular sectional interest. His is a voice that should be heard once more. The magazine that first published his visionary words was *The Bulletin*. It was through its pages that he reached his fellow Australian. It is right that with his rebirth he should again reach his audience through a paper that still champions the people.

Lawson's truths still hold despite the changes within our society because Lawson was a creative visionary. He saw the possibilities for our country and our society and his words hold even more significance for us because we are Lawson's Future Vision.

I have this to say to my people: run back my respect if you can!

(*How couldst challenge me in spirit, old!*)

'We'll win in the end, despite all the cast and hypocrisy that pervades the land.'

It is time for *The Bulletin* to reassess this great Australian writer and visionary.



BETWEEN THE LINES

'I waited two years for the right script.'

The first production in the new 880 Playhouse at 288 Miller Street is called *Between The Lines*, a play written by Marcus Cooney and starring Alexander Hay. The play is produced by Jann Harris Productions.

Jann (Yann) Harris was one of the first graduates of the Design course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art. He has worked with the Queensland Theatre Company, the Q Theatre and the Ensemble Theatre. Two years ago Jann found himself involuntarily subsidising a production he was involved with, 'I became disenchanted because of the gentlemanship played by certain people whose attitudes I believed were incompatible with professionalism'.

Jann quit 'live' theatre and concentrated on film work. He was not prepared to involve himself in theatre until he could put his principles regarding professionalism in theatre into practice. 'I waited two years for the right conditions.' The right conditions were a good script and a theatre whose management believed in professionalism in the theatre. The script was Marcus Cooney's *Between The Lines*, the theatre was John Hepburn's new 880 Playhouse. Jann had already confounded the 'knockers' by making a success of the 680 coffee theatre at Killara.

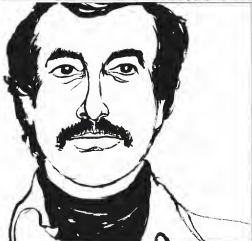
Being in the right time at the right place is the most ordering of theatrical devices and that set of coincidences played its part in Jann's return to theatre.

'I lay down at Cooney's Retreat on the Pittwater, where I share a house with the actor John Jarratt and his wife Rose. I used to see this betwixt bear of a man on the ferry. I thought he was one of the local fishermen. John arrived back one Saturday with Bill Hunter, the actor who the previous season Jann was

interested in getting Marcus to help him write the scenario for a film called 'No Heroes' which we hope will go into production next year.

One thing led to another and Jann read a script that Marcus was finishing at that time. The script was *Between The Lines*. Jann at first time was actively looking for possible venues. One possibility was the Wynyard Chapel Theatre but they were in the throes of refurbishing the theatre and it wouldn't be ready for January 1978 at the earliest.

The search for a venue had Jann rising with the cockaburins that roost in the trees around his house and returning long after the last cockaburns had bedded down for the night. The search was successfully completed when Jann rang Amy MacDonagh whose Australia Theatre is well known to Sydney readers. Amy suggested that Jann get in touch with John Howitt. Jann rang only hours after John had signed the papers to take over the Independent Theatre. John read the play and agreed to allow Jann's production to be the first play at the new Six Eighty Playhouse.



BETWEEN THE LINES

Marcus Cooney describes himself as 'an expatriate Tasmanian' and Tasmania as 'a great place to be born'. *Between The Lines* is his fourth stage play to be produced. He has spent two years researching the life of Henry Lawson for a screenplay. 'I wrote the first draft of the screenplay for a block but he had no money to develop it so it never got off the ground.

When the screenplay project folded Marcus decided to write something on Lawson for the stage — 'to get some return on my investment of time and mental energy'. It was easier said than done, he felt he had an obligation to the man, not to misrepresent him. The obvious starting point as far as Marcus was concerned was 'how Lawson described and saw himself'. There was sufficient extant correspondence to make that possible. The problem then resolved to how the material could be presented.

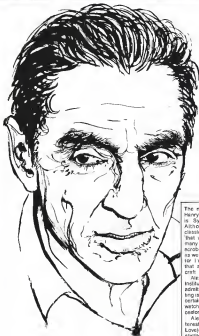
'I remembered how much admiration Lawson had for Dickens and that supplied my answers. Lawson was perennially broke so why shouldn't he hold a personal reading of his work to raise money? It is out of this situation that the tensions and truths emerge in the play. Marcus admits that much of the material was written by Lawson. The supreme compliment for me will be if nobody can recognise where Lawson ends and Cooney begins. There was no other way to tackle the problem if I wanted to stay true to the man.'

Marcus is a retiring type and it took some persuasion to get him to talk to me. 'I don't go in much for that bullshit. I think it is valid for performers to make some comments about the characters they play. Writers are a different matter.'

He may be a retiring type but from my enquiries amongst the people who know him he is not so much Jane Harris' 'Big Bear of a man' as a wild Tasmanian whose occasional forays from his lair on the Pifflester are always rewarded with some trepidation. Perhaps there is more than the writing which makes Marcus see some parallels between his and Lawson's life.



BETWEEN THE LINES



The man chosen to play the role of Harry Lawson in 'Between The Lines', is Sydney actor Alexander Hay. Although his career began with classical training, Alex points out that 'that was only one facet. I have had many roles in the theatre — dancer, scrooge, stagehand, and scene painter as well as the familiar actor and director. I was prepared to work at anything that advanced the knowledge at my craft.

Alexander was a tutor at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, although he admits that he doesn't know what acting is, and whatever it is, he is perfectly certain it can't be taught, 'you can watch the rose as it grows and occasionally add a little manure.

Alexander has always been interested in new playwrighting. Robin Loveloy and he, shares the responsibility for the first season of the 'Jana St Theatre' in Sydney. The Jana St Theatre was specifically founded as a venue for new Australian plays. In keeping with his interest in new plays, Alex is on the committee of the Australian National Playwrights conference and was Director of the conference in 1975.

Alex himself produced new plays by writers — Tom Keneally, Dorothy Hewitt, and James Scobie, at the Jana Street venue.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Eleven years ago a sherry-eyed young man had his go with B.P. Australia and landed himself in the entertainment industry. After an impressive twenty-one productions over the last eleven years, all of which were devised, produced, directed and performed in by this same young man, his future seems assured. His latest show opens in October and the Arts Council of N.S.W. want to tour the show next year. Negotiations are in progress for a National T.V. show based on the unique concept of a theatrical event that is both serious and fun for a man who started his own theatre because no-one would give him a break.

That man is John Howitt, Producer-Proprietor of the Killara 660 Coffee

Theatre in Sydney. He will celebrate the theatre's 11th birthday on Thursday October 27 with his new show 'Arsenal the World in 80 Minutes + 10'.

John has decided to expand in other directions as well and in late 1978 he offered to purchase the Independent School of Dramatic Art from Miss Doris Pilon. The sale did not go through and after the resignation of Miss Gillen Owen, the former Principal of the School, John decided with Miss Owen to create a new school to provide a growing outlet for training young actors in professional theatre, but film and television as well.

The 660 Drama School provides a three-year diploma course so only those students with potential are

accepted with admission by audition only. The forty-two week study year is divided into three terms with classes held in the evenings so part-time students can undertake the course while still undertaking employment outside the entertainment industry. Subjects cover voice and speech, movement with Mr Keith Biss, well known for his movement classes, dialects, styles, make-up, modern acting and playreading.

Video and radio training for senior students is included and film work is a valuable part of the course particularly with the renewed interest in the Australian film industry. It is interesting to note that the tutorial staff have a background of training at both in-



BETWEEN THE LINES

students as R.A.D.A. The Old Vic and the Royal Academy of Music and Drama. The school is located at Mosman, Sydney and any readers interested in making further enquiries can ring Sydney 945 3688 or write to the school at Box 371, Spit Junction 2255.

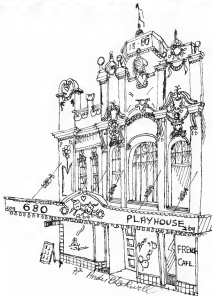
Since the establishment of the school John has not been resting on his laurels. When the Independent Theatre at North Sydney closed after almost forty years John acquired the lease on this performance space. The new Star Playhouse officially opens its doors about the same time that John's Coffee Theatre celebrates eleven years of first class entertainment, included in the

new complex is Block 60's French Cafe, specialising in French pastries and an old recipe of John's grandmother. Grand-mama's meat balls. For John the basic aim is to encourage new Australian plays and players. "But at all times we must remember to be entertaining", is the way John qualified the underlying rationale for the Playhouse.

Commercial productions will use the venue six days a week, on Sundays there will be productions from the students of the Drama School and other local theatre groups. There will be space available to workshop new Australian plays and musicals, this should give added impetus to Australian writers. Every per-

son involved in the entertainment industry must wish John Howitt the "best of Australia". Every venue staying open in Sydney offers that really scarce commodity of opportunities for the future.

The theatre is being redesigned to offer the greatest flexibility in mounting productions. This is good news to those of us who have suffered from hasty vision at the Independent Theatre in the past and although no firm policy has been established John is committed to presenting the highest calibre only, whether it be drama, musicals, revue etc.





Sydney Comes Second Best

It is not often that a regional company and the Australian Opera open productions of the same opera on consecutive nights, and it is even rarer when such a confusion does occur, that the national company comes out second best. But such a strange situation did in fact occur on 15 and 16 July last, with productions in Brisbane and Sydney of Lonnecorville's masterpiece of a little two-act, *Figliaro*.

Despite severe limitations imposed by a horrendously inhomogeneous venue, the Brisbane *Figliaro* was a magnificent piece of music theatre, despite all the advantages conferred by a fully professional company and a much more conducive venue, the Sydney *Figliaro* was one of the least satisfying opera experiences I has ever been my misfortune to be confronted with. Its failure was both monumental and irreparable on several grounds, for it arose through an almost wilful combination, seemingly, of terrible casting, poor production and inappropriate conducting. It was doubly unfortunate because it was one half of a double bill whose other half was excellent, and because it so easily could have been a triumph instead of a disaster.

The major fault in this *Figliaro* was Sergio Benigni's Canio, neither vocally nor dramatically was he convincing or effective for a moment, and this put it so vital to an effective realisation of *Figliaro* on stage that the piece simply cannot succeed without a strong Canio. Benigni has a pleasant enough voice and stage presence, would for all I know be thoroughly acceptable in any number of other roles, but it is absurd that he was apparently chosen in preference to two other singers either of whom would have been convincing in the part.

And this is no matter of mere conjecture, for Donald Smith, who has just returned to the AO as a guest artist, is a superb Canio — one might quite justifiably go so far as to say he is to say it is his best role, dramatically, and an unknown, locally, Sydney resident by the name of Viscol Raymont could also have been engaged to sing the role. In the event, Raymont got the Canio glory in Brisbane and Smith made his rapprochement with the national company as Don Jose in *Carmina*, a role he sings — as always — magnificently but acts barely adequately in the aftermath of as dynamic a singing actor as Raymont.

The Brisbane coupling of *Figliaro* with its traditional twin, Mascagni's *Carolina* *Figliaro*, was an unequivocal production triumph for John Thompson and his Queensland Opera Company despite the

quirky acoustics of the Brisbane City Hall with its circular dome that alternately confers on singers the false impression they are being amplified artificially and that they have all but lost their voices completely merely by moving a few feet one way or the other.

Though there were flaws of detail — a smattering of heavy-breasting and gawky strutting about that came perilously close to transforming dreams into melodrama, and some very strange lighting effects — the overall concept of this *Carolina* was a

brilliant stroke of theatre that never faltered for a moment. The set (designed by Aaron Rodewald of the Queensland Theatre Company) consisted of a huge church facade that both virtually obliterated the feeling of the naked hall and at the same time provided an ideal visual atmosphere for *Carolina* *Figliaro*. The drum-headed portions of the hall's permanently resident pews argue that peeped out from behind only served to enhance the feeling of the piece.

The orchestra of course had to be



Don Benigni as Canio. Queensland Opera's better April night Opera.





Actresses Queenie, Patricia Hayes, Judy Clay

stationed on the flat floor between the stage and the audience, surrounded in the excessively wide body of the hall for its depth by acres of open floor space which were sometimes invaded by performers — as during the religious procession in *Cavalliere Rustico*, which moved across between the audience and the orchestra before commencing the stage proper from the opposite side.

But the most striking innovation of the evening came after interval, when the musical troupe of players in *Pygmalion* arrived through a side door complete with a vest holding the hats and gloves of the three top-hatted ladies that was to provide the venue for the pantomime within the opera that leads to the final denouement. On opening night, when I saw this *Cav/Pyg*, Kayebee nearly demolished the canvas-and-wood framework, so the following night, while I was watching the *Sydney Pym*, he apparently accidentally did.

In the Queensland *Cavalliere Rustico*, Valeria Hanson was an excellent Susanna and Robert Harrington a very good Tundalo, though they did not strike quite as many dramatic sparks off each other as is implied in the synopsis, and Dama White was a thoroughly convincing Alisa. In *Pygmalion*, Kayebee turned in a remarkably effective dramatic performance that built up the act of electrifying scenes late in the piece that made the theatre double murder at the end thoroughly credible, but he also sang with great power and conviction and feeling, sounding at times uncannily like Donald Smith at his best. Phyllis Bell (Nedda) nearly matched him in all departments. Paul Neal, as Totto, did fall just short to the *Prologues*, and held up his corner of the cast of the dramatic scenes amply. John Ryall was an excellent Hogg.

The following night, at the Sydney Opera House, things started off well enough when John Shaw sang a very strong *Prologue*, though it looked a measure of the dramatic orientation Robert Albritton has given to the cast in the past. But from that point on things deteriorated alarmingly. I have already said enough about Hoggins, but his Nedda, Beryl Forbes, failed to make much of an impression either vocally or dramatically, and John Pugh never came to life as her lover

Silva. Graeme Lee's Hogg was the best performance of the night, but the role is not important enough to salvage an otherwise unsatisfactory staging of the piece. Melitta Crambell's rebirth of Sophie's Hall's original production stimulated many of its original good points without introducing any new virtues of its own. And Richard Bagnall seemed ill at ease with *Pygmalion*.

Though not, at least partly to the same extent, with *Patricia's* *Sue Angiera*, with Jane Southland in the title role, which completed the Sydney double bill. Indeed, this was just about as good a reckoning of *Angiera* as one is ever likely to see. Southland was blessed with a powerful body of female AD talent in the supporting roles (Elizabeth Forester, Lesley Stender, Cynthia Johnston, Heather Bagg, Isabel Buchanan, Rosina Rothblatt), and sang reasonably and acted very convincingly herself — putting ring about appreciably in the background with watering tin and towel in the early stages, establishing her character before the singing took over. *Sue Angiera*, though, was probably only be seen to its best advantage when it is placed as *Pygmalion* succeeded, at the centre of the *Tessaro* between the fierce melodrama of *Il Tabarro* and the very black comedy of *Gianni Schicchi*.

Robert Hathorley's production of Offenbach's musical travesty of Debut's *Robertson Crusoe* was a thoroughly delightful romp of a night out despite the usual intrusive findings of Sydney's suburban Rockdale company and the anomalous contrivances inevitably arising from any attempt to stage opera in the round. The idea of building a much-desert island in the middle of Rockdale Town Hall was fine, but the actual island was somewhat precarious and cramped for the performers and it was well nigh impossible to catch all the words from any seat in the hall since on average you would only be tang at directly one-quarter of the time.

But there were many compensations in the amusing inventiveness of Hathorley's direction — from Crusoe's first appearance at the desert island, borne shoulder high on a raft with characters in the guise of sea nymphs all round, to the cascade of conflicts which descended through the ending to mark the final wedding tableau.

But far and away the greatest achievement of the operatic month was the Australian Opera's realisation of Verdi's *Macbeth*, a new production by John Copley which opened on 4 August, conducted by John Prichard and starring John Shaw in the title role and Elizabeth Connell as Lady Macbeth. Though there were some sizeable problems at opening, there was no doubt even then that this would be one of the AD's better efforts once it had a chance to settle down.

Much of the strength, and a little of the weakness, of this *Macbeth* must be attributed to Stephen Lisovsky's design, for visually stunning as the sets are they require intricate and cumbersome scene changes which simply cannot be accomplished with great speed — and thus

inevitably underscore the episodic nature of the opera, which contains no less than 10 scenes in its four acts. This problem is most serious when it intrudes into the act-two scene — during the closing stages, for Verdi's Act IV has four scenes, none of them quite short.

But there is no doubting the brilliance of the Lisovsky design: the massive walls of open grillwork suspended centrally, the grotesquely distorted throne and crudely evocative instruments of war, the weighty costumes with scarcely a trace of color anywhere except the flecks of red that afflict the Macbeths — symbols, no doubt, of the blood they spill or meant to be split still in process their final ending.

The lighting (attributed jointly to Copley and Roger Barratt) is equally brilliant, clothing the enormous sets with silver edges as if they are dripping-damp and shining-wet, nearly always something as sophisticated against a drab black background. But never is there the slightest difficulty in seeing what the audience needs to see: always pools of light reveal faces and action with crystal clarity.

The production escapes masterfully with some of the inbuilt weaknesses of the opera. Lady Macbeth's manipulation and illogical appearance at the end of the second wedding scene, for instance, is underpinned by a sudden scene change back to the castle in full view of the audience as Macbeth swears (why could not more of the scene changes have been handled in this expedient and effective way?).

And Fleance (admirably played by Hugh Morton) curls up and goes to sleep during Banquo's pre-murder aria, waking up at the dying warning of his father and confronting the assassins by hurling a cloak at them — thus leading some evidence to his escape from 20-cold well-armed thugs. The difficult twin appearances of Banquo's ghost are effectively handled. Elsewhere the production is meticulously logical and straight-forward rather than spectacularly imaginative, though some may find the witches rather too grotesque in appearance and too heavily masked so be able to do full justice to their vocal shrieks.

Given that Lady Macbeth was a truly understated on opening night, but had already gained a great deal in dramatic power a couple of days later, likewise Shaw's Macbeth. Before the season is ended, they will no doubt have communicated an electrifying stage marriage. Donald Shafer's Banquo is magnificently sung and acted, Lambertus Furlan's Macduff a truly fantastic, Paul Ferris' Malcolm an excellent portrayal of the embattled youth who is so vital to the plot that his so little part on stage is proof of Prichard's conducting was meticulous but a little late.

Overall, then, this was a fine realisation of an opera of considerable force, a pleasant and useful piece, if at times unappreciably so, but from a masterpiece, when compared to Verdi's last two Shakespearean operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, but a very strong and effective night at the opera for all that.

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Thorne, *Theatre in Australia* Hagen, *Respect for Acting*

B

THEATRES IN AUSTRALIA An Historical Perspective of Significant Buildings

ROSS THORNE



Teaming country towns can be a depressing experience. I remember arriving at the School of Arts, in Nowra, N.S.W., for a single performance (of a show designed for a thrust stage) in that plain, empty, procession-arch assembly hall of a theatre. We had trouble filling the first two tiers, let alone the 18th Victorian gallery (with cast-iron ogre shaped balustrade) which Ross Thorne finds (mis)leading in his *Theatres in Australia*. If only I had had the book then, his enthusiasm for such old Australian theatres might have alleviated the gloomy feeling of the place.

We are lucky to have Professor Thorne. He is an architect with a scholarly interest in theatre buildings, but he also brings to his work a sensitive understanding of what theatres are for, and an enthusiasm which can be sensed in every description and every scholarly argument over dates. In this new book, the text of a Kathleen Robinson lecture he gave in Sydney in 1976, he is writing also as an historian — showing, through selected examples, some of the ways in which attitudes to theatres changed during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and how these changes are reflected in the buildings themselves.

He explains at the beginning that the selection, for a short paper, has had to be partly arbitrary, but that he has tried to include as much new material as possible since the publication (in 1971) of his large, 2 volume *Theatre Buildings in Australia to 1900*. He also claims to have distanced from the nostalgia trail and so left out some well known theatres, but there is plenty of room for nostalgia or at least imaginative involvement, with the theatres he does include.

This is more than a supplement to the earlier book and it is of more than scholarly interest. What theatres they were! Harriet Levy's Theatre Royal in Sydney, opened in 1833, must have been impossibly crowded by our standards (small stuffy and uncomfortable). Back in the Georgian style of the famous ancient theatre at Rochester, Yorkshire, it had different types of seating in a variety unknown in modern theatres. The different feeling of sitting in the pit, or in a box seat to the proscenium, or in the upper gallery would have been immense. Of the little Chifflers Theatre, in Victoria built because of the slightly delayed impact of the gold rushes, in 1867:

The photographs show a dilapidated brick shed stuck on the back of what was originally a pub, but the list of entertainments that took place there makes it look almost romantic. It is fascinating to speculate on what happened on these early places of mass entertainment. We must be grateful to Professor Thorne for capturing this aspect of our theatrical past.

The book also teaches us (again of the desolate country arts centres that have been built since the second world war. Designed as all-purpose venues for plays, concerts and dances, they end up being suitable for areas where a number of small or specialist areas might not only enter for different needs more efficiently, but be cheaper to build.

In a book such as this the photographs are obviously very important, for better than the text they can give us an idea of what these theatres were like and how it felt to be part of an audience, or a performer, in them. Unfortunately the quality of many of the pictures is very poor. The ground plans and cross-sections of theatres are straightforward and understandable, but to the layman many of the photographs are unclear and uninformative. Particularly, some of the exterior pictures are uninteresting to the untrained eye, of the interior features which the captions suggest are the point of including them. In other cases they are too dark, or simply give no idea of what the theatre looks like to be in, as in the pictures of the New Persons Theatre in Perth and Walter Murray Griffin's Opera-House Theatre in Collingwood, Sydney. Some of the pictures are good. If you want to find out exactly what's at a scene, have a look at the plans of the Theatre Royal, Chifflers Tavern, Queensland.

There is also what I assume to be a misprint in the caption to illustration 2

where the date should surely be 1833, not 1883, for the Theatre Royal, Sydney. I mention this triviality because it is a rather ironic. The initial confusion about that theatre arose when 1838 was mistaken as 1833, as Professor Thorne explains. Let us hope that researchers in 200 years will not be further confused.

Like Hagen's book, *Respect for Acting*, respects a particular school of acting — the Method. Mr Hagen was a former pupil of Lee Strasberg and a successful professional actor and teacher in the United States. His book is an often very personal account of the process by which actors can achieve truth in performance through finding the truth of a dramatic action in themselves. The principal device for doing this is "substitution", whereby actors use elements of their own lives and their own experience to make real, for themselves, the actions of the character. The example of this which I've always liked best, mainly because it is ludicrous, is the suggestion that if you've ever wanted to kill a mosquito or a stinging bug then you have the entire memory to play Othello. (This was given by Richard Boldingford, of whom Mr Hagen, through Strasberg, is a great pupil, so to speak.)

Control in the book is a series of 16 "Object Exercises" which are intended as an equivalent to ballet exercises or music practice. Each is a way of rehearsing different sorts of behaviour — in order to understand and then consolidate true, or honest action on stage.

It is difficult to say how useful this book would be for Australian actors. Certainly the conditions for actors in the United States appear very different. The commercial pressures on them seem very great and there is even less chance for ensemble work than there is here. Also I worry that these methods might lead actors even more firmly into the arms of those critics for whom the words "method" and "realism" are the highest praise. We need less conviction and more commitment, less credibility and more ideas.

Respect for Acting does demonstrate just this respect for a profession which every layman thinks he could do if he tried and of which he thinks himself a valid critic. It also shows a commendable concern for seriousness and professional self-discipline, and contains the odd refreshingly pat Old Truth. If it doesn't add anything to the theory of acting, it at least gives a valuable insight into the mind and Method of an actor and teacher highly thought of in his own country.

Rescued from the footnotes: Mozart's *Zaide* Major film score: Shostakovich's *The Gadfly*

To find another workable Mozart opera would be to court by most music lovers in one of the most agreeable kinds of present *Zaide*, composed in 1783 when Mozart was twenty-four, is not quite that. Mozart did not finish it. Nor did he give it a title. *Zaide* has been collected for general use as a title from the circumstance that it is the leading soprano's name. Furthermore, we can find better representation of the basic story also in *Zaide* by turning to another German opera derived from Singspiel and other traditions in the *Entföhrung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Harem) or *The Singspiel* as it is sometimes called. Mozart was just years older when he wrote *Die Entföhrung*, and it reflects his growth in musical ambition, discrimination in stagecraft and consistency of characterization.

All the same, *Zaide* is evidently not to be considered to be one of the less frequently consulted volumes in the splendid New Mozart Edition. A group of excellent solo singers (Edith Mathis, Peter Schreier, Ingrid Wiess) among them have been brought together with the Berlin State Orchestra (Karl Böhm, then in, where a superb tradition in the playing of Mozart is still flourishing) under the direction of Hansard Klee to record all the music of *Zaide* that actually survives (Philips 6390 007, 2 discs).

It would be difficult to present this score of *Zaide* as the theatre as a self-sufficient entertainment. This is where recording can rescue a substantial piece of music like this from relegation to the footnotes of musical history and keep it permanently in circulation as living music without asking that listeners accept it as part of the standard operatic repertoire.

The remains of *Zaide* are quite considerable. We have fifteen numbers complete among the manuscript papers that Mozart's widow, Constanze, discovered among his effects after his death. This compares with twenty-one numbers in the complete score of the *Entföhrung*. In other words, we have in *Zaide* approximately five-sevenths of the opera as it probably would have existed had Mozart completed it. Why he did not complete it we shall never know for certain, it seems. He wanted very much to write operas. He had probably heard that plans to produce German operas in Vienna were under way.

The quality of the music that survives makes it clear that he did not stop at his composing inactivity in writing the score. He may have been brought up short by a realization that the dramatic construction



of the text as far as we can deduce it, was rather lame. Everything is solved by imagination — as indeed it is in *Die Entföhrung*. The difference is that *Die Entföhrung* at least supplies us with a certain amount of contentment and fun on the way to the predictable denouement.

Although the magnanimity of *Die Entföhrung* may be as probable, it is based on a conscious decision by the Eastern potentate who is the owner of the harem referred to in the opera's title. In *Zaide* the magnanimity of the comparable ruler springs from two acts of far-fetched coincidences.

There is an Osman in *Zaide* as there is in *Die Entföhrung*, and he fulfils a similar function in guarding and supervising the establishment. But his single role ends in *Zaide* is much simpler and represents a much more rudimentary kind of characterization than the richly joviality of the Osman we know in *Die Entföhrung*. We cannot be certain just how much additional fun would have been incorporated in the spoken dialogue of the poor *Zaide* belongs to the German Singspiel tradition in having spoken dialogue.

The libretto from which Mozart was working has been lost, and his score contains only the verbal cues for the musical numbers. The reconstruction involved in the present recording has included the repositioning of an arioso from elsewhere in Mozart's papers (the Overture-Symphony in G, K.318, which Alfred Einstein thought, incorrectly it seems, may have belonged to this opera in any case), the supply of linking dialogue from a text which was evidently one of the sources of Mozart's librettist Schupacher, and the finishing off of the proceedings, in the absence of a genuine conclusion, with a festive march, K.335 No. 1.

Zaide has one extremely interesting

element in it which is not to be found in the *Entföhrung*. It has two numbers in its repertoire technique in the other name of that form. The words of these two numbers are spoken, and the orchestral music supplied by Mozart punctuates the words and acts as an expressive commentary on them. Mozart had devised the application of this technique to a complete drama by the Czech composer Smetana and more than once contemplated writing a drama in similar style himself.

The two melodramatic numbers in *Zaide* give us a very good idea, then, of how the greatest operatic dramatist of the 18th century would have approached such a task. One is a monologue by the slave Gloriana, the other is a dialogue between the taken Solomon and his servant Osman. I find these numbers very elegant. It is clear that Mozart lavished all the expressive devices and rhetorical vocabulary at his disposal on the orchestral punctuation of the spoken words.

The action, unlike his counterpart in the *Entföhrung*, is a singing as well as speaking part. But the producers of these discs have substituted, in any case, skilled actors for the singers in the melodramatic passages and also in the spoken dialogue.

This would not be acceptable in the theatre, of course, but it has merit on disc, especially when the speaking and singing voices are well-matched as singers, as they are here. The music that Peter Schreier brings as Gloriana in much more conventional and simple than the combination of spoken word and dramatic orchestral writing which involves his speaking counterpart, Gerd Grasse.

Werner Hollweg, who sings the part of the sultan, is better served with one outstanding aria of rage. *Zaide* has an aria of defiance, "Tiger! werte mich klauen!" (Tiger! sharpen your claws), and producers of the *Entföhrung* are likely to look in this piece with longing to representing a much more concise and stage-worthy combination in the drama in the point of the story than the gigantic musical movements provided for Constanze in that opera at a similar point of the action.

Edith Mathis, one of the most enchanting singers to have come out of Germany in recent years, is not quite ideal on this part: her lyrical voice is a striking light for the task, and the part also has consistently just a notch or two high for her to be really comfortable. Even in the concluding aria "Aber auch!" (But, gently, which develops its lovely rolling cad from being set in common measure, the listener

becomes aware, much as he is enjoying the style of Miss Martha's singing, that the vocal line at times seems to be straying at G or A above the staff at almost every second note.

Alfred, a trusted servant of the salon, who turned out not only to have saved the salon's life in some conceivably long-past battle but also to be the father of both Zaida and Gemma, is an interesting character too, portrayed exactly in the Edgely style. He has two well-made arias which are offshoots on record but which, I think, would not work particularly well in the theatre. There is a beautiful quartet (No 13), distinguished by the success of its woodwind relief, and a trio (No 8) in which the orchestral suggestion of thunder is absorbed into the total musical fabric without breaking it.

I recommend the set not only to lovers of Mozart but also to anyone interested in the history of the Singapur in the 18th century: singing, orchestral playing and recording are all of a high order.

There are huge tracts of Soviet film which remain unknown to us. I have never heard of the film *The Gadfly*, but now we have released here a complete disc of the music written by Shostakovich for that film (*SWW/Melodisc ASD 3499*). For this reason, most of Shostakovich's quite extensive work for Soviet films would be unknown to most of us with the exception of his score for the colossal Russian film of 1941. *The Gadfly* was apparently made in 1935.

The title is not particularly suggestive of the kind of story that it tells. *The Gadfly* was apparently the nickname of an Irish 19th century patriot, fighting against the hated Austrian overlords of considerable tracts of Northern Italy. L.L. Wynne apparently wrote the story in the form of a novel somewhere near the beginning of the century, and the same source has also yielded, I learn, a Soviet opera.

Perhaps because the film is an historical adventure, Shostakovich's music is not, suitably characteristic of his mature style. He has drawn much more freely on his Russian symphonic forbears in this score than he did in his works for the international Tchaikovsky, curiously mentioned as one of Shostakovich's stylistic godfathers, as much is evident. This kind of stylistic debt does not weaken the quality of the music in terms of its stated purpose, it merely lays on identity a little.

The score, in other words, is clearly the work of a master and a well worth hearing on its own right. It is only the accident of its being tied to a film so far unknown or little known in the world at large that has prevented it from being recognised up to now as one of the major scores in the history of film music. The recording has been made by the USSR Cinema Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leon Khasinatov (not the composer, who is Aram). My only technical complaint is that the top-staff to some of the tracks are a little premature.

Two conservative managements



It would seem to me that the Edgely organisation isn't capable of thinking in the long term, specifically in terms of the effects of the its overseas ballet circuits touring Australia.

The mentality of the last back seems to be the driving force. Always we get these moderately good overseas ballet companies, most experienced, under-rehearsed, badly compacted, full-height black-baller ballet. Always they are the backing to some "suspense" or other.

Since Rudolf Nureyev is a well worn name in the public mind, Edgely's always seem to think he is good for the box office health, artistic standards hardly seem to matter not on the evidence of the material so far.

In the last few years, only two companies stand out as anything really worthwhile in presentation, as choreography or sublimationism. These being the Netherlands Dance Theatre and the Stuttgart Ballet. Edgely's got their fingers burnt (frequently speaking) with the Netherlands Dance Theatre season. But it was equally their own lack. They over-gubbed that dreary programme for the space-age with (semi)audacity, the Glen Tully, Hans van Manne Maestries. Everybody flocked along to be lulled by that and ignored the other two programmes which were filled with excellent choreography of far greater worth than the tedious exposure of *Metamorphoses* dragging a slow weight along.

The Edgely corporation obviously thought that Australian didn't understand modern choreography and wouldn't want it (have they ever bothered to do a bit of market research?). So apart from the Stuttgart (which even so was "played safe" with Cranko's *Taming of the Shrew*), we've had the Bolshoi Ballet, doing yesterday's *Les Sylphides* with a couple of past day's themes at the end and folk dance groups from Siberia or Georgia or God knows where, and more recently the London Festival Ballet with *The Sleeping Beauty* and now *Romeo and Juliet*, both

team with Nureyev.

I thought Nureyev's own version of *Sleeping Beauty* an absolute riddle. All that window dressing and my lady adulations used to disguise an ethereal ignorance of what makes for choreographic structure in a full length work. The worst goes for *Romeo and Juliet* (is Nureyev at last making that he's approaching the end of the rainbow and has decided to turn choreographer now, forcing them on some glibbie company that will take them because they need his PR image for a healthy box office taking)? Could not something of the "give 'em more, that's all they understand" mentality, as Nellie Melba's famous song apply? Do these "suspense" discs below their last level for in *Dance Under*, creating it as a bit of a holiday?

Of course students will love a hint at Australia, they don't go to the ballet to see good dancing, they go only for the costumes, cultural culture as it were.

Edgely's obviously aren't going to bother to educate and inform them and thereby aid and abet the vicious circle of ignorance.

I almost didn't get to use this present version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Edgely's decided that *Theatre Australia* wasn't worthy as a publicity fanner therefore no complementary news would be forthcoming, going instead to those writers of flower-arranging, the reviewers of the intellectual dinkies like *The Sun*, *The Mirror* and *The Telegraph*.

Real expanded interest and analysis the like of which *Theatre Australia* is capable (and yes I think I am capable of going all gone for broke) is the publicity fanner that makes *Strangers* how Edgely's blow hot and cold with the press.

Anyway, I did get to see the ballet. I had a couple of friends in the Company and they managed to pull a pony in the box office for me (Sol Hurok would have been proud of me).

It was just what I had expected it to be, a pompous, overblown minutely choreographed story from window box. Of all the *R* and *J* I've seen (including Gimpson's, MacLennan, Cranko's and Bayon's) this was the worst. Indeed I would even go so far as to say that Nureyev has found his influences here and there in all these choreographers and things there into the hotch potch, specifically that final pas de deux on the tomb stone which bears a remarkable resemblance to Bourns' saccharine effort (yet to the better music of all things).

It just wasn't good enough. To my mind, the costumes were terrible, the set changes

were unimpressive, the sympathetic audience got in the way, the programmes were a bit off and at times the over-enthusiastic audience applauded madly on their ignorance.

Anyway, the case is that Edgley's feel that this was the last of the patronages, a being too expensive to keep doing. (They say they take risks but for the life of me I can't believe it.)

Look, honestly — the great draw card is Murray, right?

So why back him with these touring ballet companies? Why not arrange one of those "Murray and Friends" parties (this always go down so well in London and New York)? With the name Murray in the publicity blurb audiences would be assured. Yet with ballets like *Proserpine*, *Lamora*, *Apollon* and the *Moiree Fatales*, say, the overbills would be cut drastically, scenery would be minimised and Australian audiences would be given a chance to see great works by great choreographers, well danced (despite Murray). It would serve to educate the audience.

This might be the plan for the future when with Edgley's packing Bobby Holpmann off around the world to pick up names for a choreographic firm sometime next year. Who knows, they might come up with something interesting next time.

Now that Anne Woodhouse has resigned, what has been decided for the future of the *Australian Ballet*? What is Peter Balen going to do towards managing the company after so many years at the end of the year? Kelvin Cox is going, so is Jonathan Kelly amongst others.

Are we going to get the *Murray Ballet* still in it coming out of our ears? (Let's hope that Sutherland's performance in the box and real review puts paid to it being seen in Sydney ever again.)

The Board is coming around already for a replacement (John Field took one look at the contract a long time ago and by now the word must be out among the international ballet trape). This sort of thing does nothing but engender total demoralisation amongst the dancers and apprehension amongst the audience.

If the Board and Mr Balen are thinking of concentrating on the full length ballets, hoping to keep their subscribers, let them remember that these subscribers are elderly, are dying off every year and the new ones are not concerned with these touring performances.

Also they should note that the Australian Opera has had a lot of subscription left unreserved by people protesting against a constant diet of things like *Mohave Butterfly*, *Carmen* and *Proserpine*.

Audience tastes change and sometimes administrators are too slow off the mark in adjusting to them.

Again it is the problem (just one that Woodhouse has tried to battle) of not looking and planning far enough into the future. The Board voted recently in overwhelming confidence in Mr Balen

(who by the way is also the Secretary to the Board), and accepted with alacrity Miss Woodhouse's resignation.

But unfortunately all the setbacks, with changes and counter changes being laid, it would seem that trouble has been building within the company for a long time and Miss Woodhouse was not altogether little sun-gloody-two-shoes either.

For a start, when Holpmann's rage was terminated, the company looked after itself, which is absolutely disaster for any company.

When Woodhouse arrived with her ideas, plans and personal disciplines, quite a few can were muddled in and some disaffection was born. A group of dancers went to Balen with a list of complaints against Woodhouse, when these were brought into the open, tensions flared and so Woodhouse left.

Secondly there was such an ostriched reaction to Murray in a Cope at an Sydney premiere that the Board might have got cold feet about it all (not to mention the mileage too far).

Personally I think Woodhouse might have been at fault in dropping the *Australian Ballet*'s oh so conservative, blue nose audience into the deep end of modern dance so abruptly. What was needed (and it still needs) is a gradual weaning case it is so as to slowly show that there is something beyond the narrow and quickly exhausted confines of nineteenth century ballet.

Provided both money and permission were available they could have built up a stockhouse of works that could take audiences on a tour of the entire horizon of what has happened in dance since 1840.

Starting all with perhaps Coppola (and why haven't they danced off that one, it was always good but often) they could continue with Paken's *Scherzando*, *Caravaggio* and *Proserpine*, then Massine's *Le Trocense* and *Parade*, Nijinski's *Les Noirs*, Kurt Joos's *Green Table*, Balanchine's *Apollon* and *Four Temperaments*, Ashton's *Daphne* and *Chloe*, Macmillan's *Song of the Earth* and, if they worked hard enough, some works by Martha Graham, Jerome Robbins, *Dances on a Gorking* and *Prologue to the Mid afternoon of the First Urban* were plans at one stage to get that one but I believe something went wrong and so on with Tilly, Bourns (*Le Corvise*), van Manen (*Contra Jump*) and ending up with my Twyla Tharp (there are plans to have her *July Rode* next year) and of course Australian born choreographers.

All of these mentioned works are of course my taste, but I do think they are worth enough to please a lot of people and to equally develop a taste and understanding for modern dance.

Australian audiences rarely (if ever) get a chance to see these great works and the *Australian Ballet* of all the dance organisations now functioning in this country should be doing its utmost in educating audiences. But I can't see it happening until some dirty minded winking out of the obstructive dead wood is achieved.

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a division of the Arts Council of Australia

The Arts Council of South Australia is funded through State and Federal sources to encourage and maintain a varied pattern of arts provision throughout the State.

Through its network of 37 branches, whose needs and preferences are taken into account when planning touring programmes, the Arts Council endeavours to provide even the remotest areas with a balanced programme of activities in the fields of

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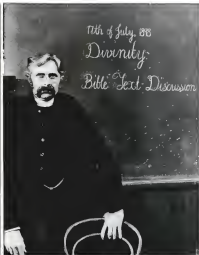
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Further details from:
The Administrator,
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5000
Telephone (08) 212 2644

The Getting of Wisdom Storm Boy



The Getting of Wisdom Barry Humphries as the Rev. Mr Strachey

Two Australian films with highly contrasted theme and style were launched half way through August. Both are winners, and must inject a fortifying confidence into the local industry.

They are *The Getting of Wisdom*, produced by Philip Adams from the novel of the same name by Henry Handel Richardson and the South Australian Film Corporation's *Storm Boy* from the book by Cape Thiele. It's interesting, though perhaps coincidental that both these films came from books that are each in their own way exceptional, and were translated into film by gifted scriptwriters.

I suppose it can't be said too often that the film will be good as good as the writing

The Getting of Wisdom is about the ungoat of a tough talented little country girl as a rather uneasy young ladies' academy in Melbourne, and of the country's effect on her. The time is 1897. Girls of Queen Victoria are scattered among the jays of papyrus, the too-often-omitted back of the stadium body's show classes in the dingy corridors, the younger among the teachers are beginning to feel the strength of French girls, and the mood of the school is governed by parents and a board of governors that attempts that the rule are always right.

The little country girl is Laura. Twelfth Rumboldson, whose mother runs the post office at Warracoba, a one street daily

town. The snobs are tough on her clothes and her appearance and try to do her down. She fights back, with superior knowledge gleaned from books, lies and play-acting a love affair.

She has the occasional support of one or other of the variable girls, swapped by every social season, and some sympathy from the assistant head mistress. The remote headmaster, the Reverend Mr Strachey, regards her with a kind of appalled interest, as if she were aphids on his standard roses.

The Getting of Wisdom will inevitably be compared with *Peter and Margery* Week, just because it is about a girls' school. But there is absolutely no connection, and no similarity in the director's style, camera work or settings. Incidentally, average film people may find an odd lot, three of our best films being about schoolgirls and schoolboys — *Peter*, *The Getting of Wisdom* and *The Devil's Playground*. We will be noted as a nation of paedophiles.

The Getting of Wisdom is a strong, lively, confident film which always happens where it is going. Produced by Philip (Don's Party) Adams for Southern Cross Films, it is directed by Bruce Beresford and photographed by Don McAlpin. The script from the short novel by Henry Handel Richardson is by Eleanor Wescott and it all works very well. One or two scenes may inevitably be moved, but there is nothing to make the hair stand on end.

Southern Cross found their lead in an unexpected Melbourne girl, Savannah French, 15 years old, with a devious profile, redrawing discipline, a sharp voice, boyishish walk, all qualities that suit the role. One doesn't know what else she can do, but she can certainly do Laura.

Laura/Savannah French dominates, as she is meant to. But the script ingeniously plants competitors all around her — the Rev. Mr Strachey, somewhat (Dickensian) but minus spleen or sentimentality, played by Barry Humphries, the younger clerk, the Rev. Mr Shephard, a bully and hypocrite (John Waters), two school mistresses, Miss Zerkow, romantic and Miss Snowgrass, cynical, played by Candy Raymond and Jan Fredi. Hilary Ryan as the head girl Evelyn, a somewhat Angela Brazil young lady, rather too smooth and beautiful to be true, the bold, comic Lilli with her footballer's love and her gook (Sam Dwyer). There is an appealing portrait of a well-intentioned teacher, Miss Chapman, from Patricia Kennedy.

It would be difficult to make a period film like this without slipping occasionally

into caricature and stereotype. The head mistress (Shirley Hedges) falls victim to this, and so does John Waters. Perhaps unexpectedly, Barry Humphries is perfectly in control of his Mr Strachey, in the same time rigid and unsexy. He never plays for easy laughs.

One of the real attractions of *The Getting of Wisdom* (and a shimmering mermaid in evening is the juggle of girls at the boarding school — English, Irish, German, Norwegian and so on), is the devotion from friendship to rivalry, games and games and overtly "colossal". They are awful, but interesting.

The Getting of Wisdom was Henry Handel Richardson's second novel, published in 1916. Her old school, F.D., was instantly recognisable and the affidavit governing body created by someone far more from the horror roll.

Strove Bay is an instant classic, in the category of *The Red Balloon* and that film about the white horses of the Camargue called, I think, *Cos blanc*. I can imagine *Strove Bay* uncut in everybody's memory (and still showing in a thousand cinemas around the world after we have forgotten every Disney work with the possible exception of Pinocchio).

The film has three elements for its kind — a simple story, simple objects to love and admire, astonishing landscapes. In *Strove Bay* the simple objects are a 19 year old boy, a father, a black man, a pelican, a duck, some boats. The setting is the Coorong, a wild spot in South Australia of breathtaking grandeur and ever changing beauty.

As for the story, it's about a boy who doesn't go to school but sits up and down the mucky inland all day, thanks his father the clearest boatman in the world, meets a

pelican for companionship, meets a black man named Fingertone, thinks he might like to go to school, loses his pelican to illegal shooters, resists himself to having only one parent.

I can't think of anywhere in the world where *Strove Bay* could not be enjoyed without benefit of translation. Everybody can understand what it is like to shelter from a storm, situate man from a sinking boat, catch a fish, lose an animal, sometimes wait a mother, wait on a beach and eat a piece of bread.

A few subtleties would take care of anyone with overacting in the relationship of father and son, the lover the better, probably.

The players in this South Australian Film Corporation's private are Greg Rowe as Mike, or Strove Bay, Peter Cummins as Hidesway Tom, the father, Gulpilil as Fingertone, the black man, Colin Thiele, the South Australian novelist, wrote the book and Henri Sullivan directed, Matt Carroll produced, Geoff Burton handled the photography and Michael Carlow's music made an intriguing match with the images.

The thing to be said at once about *Strove Bay* is that it is, concerning, about the most necessary quality a film can have. And the film never loses on an audience with heavy messages. I suppose Fingertone is in there, the token black, to remind us how we mistreat Aboriginals and the environment. But because David Gulpilil is so much his own man, his what a colleague recently called "presence", and because Henri Sullivan directs so sensitively, there is no affect of lecturing. And one of the most attractive incidents in the film is Gulpilil's little dance on the sand, angular, precise, sensitive with life.

The invasion of the yabbies is done haggard, crashing down on Hidesway Tom's shack in the dark with peasants streaming in the gale while Strove Bay licks by some packing cases certainly points up the fact that the environment is threatened by selfish actions, but the incident is relevant, constantly delivered and comes at a stage in the film when action is essential.

As you may have heard, the pelicans, especially the pelican that stalks around with Mike (called Master Pelican), rather out of key with the place and people. *Strove Bay* can't read, so where would he have picked up that fancy name? And the story. These marvellously intelligent (perhaps anthropomorphically speaking) birds are beautiful in flight, comically dignified on the sand or water, kind to each other, and have the most remarkable black chop eyes, brought prominently to attention by Hidesway's lingering concern. Prominent among the credits is the name of Gordon Public, Pelican Trainer.

People who eat pork. *Strove Bay*, which has been enjoying a long run in Adelaide, are simply running the point of the message. Colin Thiele took a few simple facts and a bit of philosophy, and the scriptwriter and director packed them up thematically and visually, and that was it. Films in which the principal performer is a child need to be directed as few goals, with the adult actors appropriately passive. Hidesway (I assume) Peter Cummins's control, and commentary speak by voice portraying respectively a father and a schoolteacher.

I have some doubts as to whether boarding school in Adelaide would be the right place for Mike, as the ending suggests, but I suppose he could always run away.



GUIDE

ACT

SYDNEY PLAYHOUSE (pre-2001)

The Tumbler And A/T Tug Jaws with John Dandridge, Caroline Collier and John O'May
Musical Director, Michael Teasdale
choreography, Alan Haganah (Tad Noy)
Canberra Opera and Australian Opera Studio
Wagga After Hours (18-19 Nov)

CANNBERRA THEATRE (490211)

Prize and the H of the schools (11-14 Nov)
Figs (15-16 Nov)

Cannberra Opera Operetta and Bacteria
Cannberra 30 Nov-1 and 1 Dec, at the Canberra
Theatre Conductor: Donald Hillier, producer,
John Tucker, designer, Mark Waples With An
Drew Dalton, Margaret Sam, Elizabeth Jackson
etc

HOBART THEATRE RESTAURANT

Macquarie (1-11/11)

Cosette of a Lightness by Ron Foster and John
McKellar Directed by James Buchanan With
Robert Connors, Doug Williams and Mary
Winters (continuing)

JOSAN COMPANY (41 0501)

Incapacity: Performance (apple primary), The
Anger: House (pre-school and related)
Changer and Company (school schools)
Documentary on Canberra to 10 and Nov)

THEATRE THREE (41 4221)

Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare
Directed by Russ McGaughey (12 Nov)
Cassidy by Alexander Dumas Directed by Russ
McGaughey (30 Nov-17 Dec)

NEWCASTLE THEATRE

THEATRE 54 (0424 1761) post-2001

No Age / Jaws by Harold Pinter directed by
Wendy Hocking (from 4 Nov)

ARTS COUNCIL (02 9436 5011) SOUTHERN

The Star Woodland And Puppet Workshop
(continuing on primary schools and Spines
and poppers etc)

Modern Music Theatre (continuing on primary
schools tour: Hunter, New England and north
coast districts) By M As Opera for State
Singers directed and performed by Edward
Spence presented by arrangement with the State
Opera of South Australia (secondary schools
and adult concert: metropolitan south coast
Riverina and central western N.S.W., to 11
Nov)

The Bull in Bush (Show from Frank Sinatra
Theatre Restaurant William Street Sydney
directed by George Corbett, (playing south
coast) Riverina and western districts of N.S.W.
to 1 Nov)

Major McCallan: Talk singer and pianist tour
original New South Wales to 24 Nov)
Thursday Island Dancers, whose talk singing
group: visiting metropolitan primary schools,
24 and 26 Nov)

The Bard's Banquet or The Shaming of the

Iron by Michaela Forster, Ralph Warr and
Peter Stephens, directed by Colin Craig (200
travelling on tour of central-west, north-west
north coast and Western districts to 27 Nov)

AUSTRALIAN OPERA (02 9706)

Opera Theatre Spines Opera House The
McGuire Collier and Sullivan (1-2-3-4 Nov, 5
Nov (mat. and ev), 7-8-9-10-11 Nov, 12
Nov (mat. and ev)) Conductor, William Reed
at Goldline, Arnold graduate: Brian Crowley
designer: Quentin Hale choreographer: Keith
Barr

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE (Newcastle)

Flashed at 4 January With Music: over the
Rivers: Peter by Vincent M Warr Music: by
Jürgen Böck: Thers, Fri., Sat., Sun (to 27
Nov)

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG

PEOPLE (09 9112)
Dorian, by Richard Faldut with Jon Caffin
and Ray Anderson visiting primary schools,
Workshops: south coast: Riverina District of
N.S.W. at association with Arts Council of
N.S.W. to 18 Dec) Workshops at P.E.D.A.
(charities, Music to 10 to end of year)

BALMAIN BEACH (02 099)

For Me People Come Music and lyrics by Earl
Wigan Jr., original production by Phil Green
man Australian production by Peter Bury
(continuing)

BONN PAVILION THEATRE (02 7111)

Supper scene: balancing Graham Bond and
John Dumas (to early Nov)

ENSEMBLE (02 9177)

A Marriage by Philip Macdonald, directed by
Haydn Gordon, designed by Bruce Pickles,
(continuing)

GENESAN (02 3021)

In Mind: Barbara by Oscar Wilde, directed
and designed by Peter Hocking (to 30 Dec)

HER MAJESTY'S (02 3400)

A Change Year original production (renewed
choreographed and directed by Michael
Reynolds and choreographer: Rick Arneson: book
by James Kirkwood and Michael Dumas, music
by Murray Henderson (lyrics by Edward Kibben
choreography and direction created for
Australia by Raynald Lee and Jeff Hamble
until 30 continuing)

WILLARA 100 COFFEE THEATRE

1000 7120
A Good Old World in 80 Minutes (the 10, down
ed and directed by John Hewitt (to 11 Dec)

MARIAN STREET (09 1044)

A Pump: Pump Apparent on the Way to the
Foster, music and lyrics by Stephen Southern
book by: Ron Shivers and Larry Gillett,
directed by Alexander Dumas, designed by Brian
Pickles musical director, Philip Scott

MARIONETTE THEATRE OF

AUSTRALIA (02 7121)
Lipstick: Painted: Jaws in Wonderland
adapted from an Australian book based on
Lime, Carroll's Alice in Wonderland by
Richard Brookman directed by Richard
Brookman (10-27 Nov)

MUSIC HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT

099 8221
Last for Power: at Perch at Perch, written
and directed by Michael Roddy (continuing)

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE RESTAURANT

071 6581
The Glass Green Show produced by William
Orr (continuing)

NEW THEATRE (09 3400)

Company of Apparent, by Carl Zuckmayer,
adapted by John Mowbray directed by Peter
Lavy, designed by Roddy Orr (continuing)

NEWCASTLE (09 9112)

Upstart, The 4/6, by David Williamson,
directed by John Hill, designed by Tim Brown
mat (from 1 Dec)
Dorchester: Jaws, by David Hadden, directed
by Ron Foster, with John Gaden, Caroline
Turner (continuing)

NO 10 THEATRE RESTAURANT St

Lambeth (09 9112)
If Company: Bacteria: Party, by Pat Gurney,
directed and produced by Pat Gurney,
choreography by Keith Latta sets by Doug
Ambler costumes by Ray Wilson, (con-
tinuing)

OLD TOTE (02 6122)

Drama Theatre, Opera House The Lower
Spirits by Maxine Galey directed by Linda
Crake designed by Michael Shorter (from 2
Nov)

Parade Theatre: Mothers and Fathers, by
Joseph Monaghan, directed by Bill Redmond,
designed by Mike Bridgman (to Nov 6)
Offshore: Atonement or Small Japan, by Ian
Stock and Robert Taylor Long, designed by
Toby Cope directed by Rodney Fisher (from
16 Nov)

OSCAR HOLLYWOOD PALACE

THEATRE RESTAURANT, Sars Sarat
(02 9415)
The Glass Green directed and written by Gary
Down and Jon Parkinson, directed and staged
by Jon Parkinson musical director: Clary
Campbell, designed by Mike Redmond
costumes by Bill Goodwin (continuing)

QTHEATRE (02 9121 1214)

The Master of Mine: Mores or The Eggs a
Cave, adapted from original material by Max
Held, directed by Ron Harkin, designed by
Arthur Banks (first in restaurant performance
at Rumbalara Town Hall from 1 Nov)

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY,

Wagga (0991 21 3331)
Jaws: Glass: Spence, by Andrew Lloyd

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